“What do you want to do when you grow up?”

 Teens often hear this from adults that care deeply about their future. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and family friends all ask lots of questions about the young person’s next steps, especially as he or she gets closer to graduation.

 But, to the teen, these questions can often feel like he or she is getting “the third degree!” For our part, we (the caring adults) are often unsure how to best help our teen proceed along this journey.

 So, how can we “prime the pump”—so to speak—and get our young person talking and thinking about the future without feeling like we are interrogating him or her? That’s the purpose of this Questioning Guide – to help provide us with some positive and proactive ways to get the young people to open up.

 It is also designed to prompt teens to think about their knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as their passions and interests. Once they’ve done that, we can help them find ways to fit those pieces together into a pathway to workforce success!
How to Use This Guide

This guide presents a few questions to get the conversation started, not a script for the entire discussion. Choose one or two really important questions and try to fit them into the chat you are already having with your teen.

Most of all, listen. Resist the temptation to tell them what to feel or “fix” their thinking. Listen to their comments and ideas. As appropriate, offer a well-placed, “tell me more.” This often can help young people uncover feelings and desires they didn’t even know they had.

Above all, relax and enjoy your time together.
Sharing Your Journey…

Does your teen know how you got to where you are now? Even in close families, sometimes we don’t share our history—especially how we choose our career or how it choose us!

Before communicating with your teenager, take a few minutes to recall your own experiences. When you were in school, did you really have any idea where your path was going to lead? Did you have a clue where you wanted to go or what you wanted to do? Do you remember the many stops and starts along the way to your current life?

Share a bit about yourself:

• If you attended a college/university, why did you decide to go there? What did you study? What was your favorite part of college life?
• If you didn’t go to college but want your teen to get a higher education, why do you hold this dream for her or him? What are your hopes for her or his future and why are they different than what you desired or did for yourself?
• What was it about your chosen career that ignited your passions?
• When things got tough, what encouraged you to stay on your course?
…And Relating to Theirs

When talking with your teenager, use your thoughts and memories to help shape your conversations. But remember, the conversation should be all about him or her. Encourage the young person to talk about himself/herself.

Listen for likes and dislikes that might guide career paths that best fit his or her personality. The more a young person is aware of these things, the easier it will be to recognize the careers that suit him or her best. Through these discussions, you can help the young person link their passions and joys to potential education pathways that can lead to a meaningful career!

Ideas to discuss include:
- Things the teen likes to do.
- How the teen spends his/her free time.
- Hobbies the teen really enjoys.
- Things the teen is really good at.
- Things the teen is passionate about.
- The teen’s favorite classes at school.
- Clubs the teen has joined (in or out of school).
- Community activities the teen is involved in.
Exploring Personal Qualities—Relating Them to a Career

Knowing ourselves—our personal qualities and characteristics—helps us choose a job we will really enjoy. Some of the following questions can help young people explore the personal qualities that will impact their ability to enjoy their chosen career:

• Are you a morning, afternoon, or evening person? What would be your ideal work schedule?
• Do you like things neat and organized?
• Do you prefer being indoors or outside?
• Do you like a setting full of people or do you refer to work quietly and alone?
• Are you more comfortable on your own or do you prefer to be part of a team or in a group?
• Do you prefer school courses with a lot of hands-on activities or with a lot of reading?
• Do you like to take things apart? Do you like to learn how things work?
• Do you prefer physical labor or using your head? (Remember: these are not always mutually exclusive.)
• Do you do your best with a lot of supervision or a little supervision?
• When thinking about desired work and/or learning spaces, would you prefer to have an office or be in a more open environment?
Current Work/School Life—Leading to a Career Pathway

The young person is probably very active now—in his or her school and/or work life—doing things that can help define post-graduation career paths. Help your teen see how what he or she is doing now can pave the way toward future goals.

Such questions might include:

- What have you liked most about the holiday, summer, or after-school work you have done? What did you like least?
- What type(s) of work are you interested in? What are three things you’d like to learn more about this work?
- What skills, experience, and education do you think you need to get your dream job?
  - Which of these do you already have?
  - Which of these do you still need to acquire?
- Are there any specific issues or roadblocks that you think might prevent you from being successful in high school and beyond?
  - If so, what strategies and resources can help you overcome those barriers?
Future Life—Dreaming of the Possibilities

Occasionally, helping young people plan their future starts with something as simple as helping them dream. In the teen years, young people are often focused on the here and now. The right question asked in the right way at the right time can help young people open up to a world of possibilities. Consider asking questions such as:

- What do you want to do after graduating from high school?
  - Do you want to keep going to school?
  - Do you want to take some time off?
  - Do you want to travel?
  - Do you want to start working right away?
- What do you imagine your life will be like at age 21? 25? 30?
  - What would you like to be doing (career/leisure/family)?
  - Where would you like to be living?
  - What kind of car do you want to drive?
- What’s your dream job? Which careers appeal to you?
- Would you like to create your own job?
- How much money do you want/need to make?
- Do you just want to make a living or do you want to change the world?
How Best Can I (or Others) Help?

Sometimes, young people need a hand asking questions and learning more about the adults around them. When together, you can ask questions that will help the young person learn more about you, as well as identify what kind of support he or she may need to reach his or her goals.

Some questions that might elicit that information include:

- What aspects of my job do you want to learn more about? What questions do you have?
- Are there other careers that you would like to learn more about? May I connect you with someone in the field who can answer some of your questions about that career?
- Do you have anyone in your life you can talk to about what it’s like to do your dream job? What will you do to find out more about the day-to-day realities of your dream job?
- How can I (or another adult) help you learn new things and make progress toward your goals? How can I help you make decisions that will help you achieve your dreams/goals?
- Are there other adults in your life (e.g., teachers, after-school staff, others) who could help you achieve your goals? How can you communicate with them about your needs?
- Do you know who to talk to at school about postsecondary options, financial aid, and career guidance?
As you can see, you can make a significant difference in the life of your teen! With just a few well timed questions and conversations, you can help him or her think through the options for the future and assist in planning for further education or successful entry into the workforce.