

# Parental Strategies for Facilitating the Career Development Process of Youth

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It is suggested that all contexts that make up youth social environments including family, school and community need to be involved in supporting their career development process (Ferrari, 2003, p.202). Ideally, these individuals and organizations should collaborate, share resources and offer each other assistance in their particular area of expertise (Ferrari, 2003, p.202). Although parents may feel inadequately prepared to support their child in the career development process, or they may be tempted to think that other, more qualified adults should assume this responsibility, parents should not discount the important influence they have on their child. Mentioned by Hurd, Zimmerman, and Xue (2009), “Researchers have found that parents have the most influence over their adolescent children in the areas of school, career orientation and future planning” (Meeus 1989; Younnis and Smollar, 1985). Parents may wonder what specific steps they can take to positively influence the career development of their children. I believe through networking with other resources, recognizing the importance of the parent-child relationship as a foundation for career exploration, and learning about essential career issues and strategies specifically related to young adolescents, parents will find there are many simple steps they can take to support their youth.

One of the ways parents play a key role in the career development process of youth is through their relationships with their children, and by their supportive behaviors of them. Overall, the literature does not point to any one specific career-related task that parents do as having an impact, but rather it is the general interest they show in their

children, the concern they have for their questions and the home environment they provide, one with high expectations and full of warmth and encouragement, that seem to make a difference (Keller & Whiston, 2008, p.210). Providing adolescents with the sense that they are significant in the lives of parents seems particularly important. "...it appears that young adolescents need to know their parents are interested in them as individuals, believe in their abilities, trust them to make good decisions, and are proud of them" (Keller & Whiston, 2008, p.211). Having these conditions present in parent-child relationships seems to play an important role in adolescents' pursuit of careers. Blustein (1997) showed that "a compelling view is emerging in which the experience of a safe and secure set of relationships within one's family is an important antecedent to career exploration" (Usinger, 2005, p.234). Probably the most important message for a parent to hear in reading this article is to **focus your time and effort on building and/or maintaining a solid relationship with your child.** It seems that successful parents have a way of making adolescents feel valued and use this shared closeness as an opportunity to share personal things about themselves, teach youth, or model behavior (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003, p.38). **Attend any workshops or trainings that are offered by professionals in the area of building positive relationships with children.**

Early on, parental influence seems to have less to do with career interests or maturity and more to do with the career self-efficacy that youth develop, or the confidence they have for executing tasks associated with certain careers. However, their influence still seems to have an effect on the overall picture, perhaps in an indirect way. "Distal factors (e.g., the environmental supports provided by parents, teachers, and professional school counselors) exert a moderating effect through learning experiences on

the young person's career related self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which then mediate the formation of interests, career-related intentions, and career-related goals" (Turner & Lapan, 2002, p.45). Therefore, another suggestion for parents is to **provide opportunities for your child to increase the confidence they have in themselves to perform tasks associated with a particular career. Try to set up experiences where your child is performing actual career-related tasks in order to help him/her continue to consider different careers and continue to develop confidence in his/her abilities related to these careers.** In order to do this, it is important that you, as a parent, **stay informed of the types of careers that will be available for your child and review career resources that provide information about specific occupations** (Turner & Lapan, 2002, p.53). "Actual participation in career preparation activities has been positively related to youths' career efficacy beliefs" (Ferrari, 2003, p.205).

There is a critical need for role modeling by parents to happen early on in the career development process. Coleman and Hendry (1990) suggest that "adult role models are most needed during adolescence" (Hurd, Zimmerman, & Xue, 2009, p. 779). This would seem to make sense as it is during this period of time that adolescents are considering future options, reflecting on their potential and beginning to form ideas about their identity. Many times these thoughts arise from interactions with others or experiences that have occurred. Research points to early adolescence (i.e. middle school years) as a particularly important time period for parents to be involved. As noted in Whiston and Keller's (2008) literature review, "During middle school, students begin to explore occupations, develop occupational aspirations and expectations (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005), form self-efficacy expectations (Turner & Lapan, 2005), and

solidify interests” (Tracey, 2002). So, as parents, consider this point and **get involved in the career development process during early adolescence as this time period has been shown to be significant.** While other parents around you may be backing off on their level of commitment to their newly independently-minded middle school student, consider doing the opposite.

Hendry et al. (1992) suggest that “while adolescents are attempting to form their identities and growing into adults, it is critical for them to have same-sex parental models with whom to identify” (Hurd, Zimmerman, & Xue, 2009, p.779). Therefore, another piece of advice for parents is to **give your child intentional opportunities to interact with same-gender parents on various aspects of career development (e.g. discussing options, learning job skills, sharing personal stories, etc.). If this type of relationship is not present in your family, consider extended same-sex family members as potential role models for your child.** These adults can act as surrogates and it has been shown adolescents may seek them out when needed (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003, p.38).

Because the role of parents as role models in the career development process continues to offer many areas of further discovery in research, I recommend that parents **stay active with new research and continue to follow emerging trends in order to use the most effective strategies with your child.** This seems to be a relatively young field for researchers with many specific aspects of influence left to uncover. The reference section of this article provides the names of many journals that could be examined on a regular basis for updates.

The following specific recommendations will allow you to better serve your child and be a resource as well as a source of support:

**-Become familiar with career-related resources**

**-Read information on careers in order to stay abreast new fields and current trends**

**-Attend career-related school or youth events that are offered including family nights and college and career fairs**

**-Connect outings/activities to careers – a visit to a museum can foster a discussion about a variety of interests related to future career opportunities - websites such as Bureau of Labor Statistics ([www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)) “BLS Career Information: Jobs for Kids Who Like....” provide career information targeted toward middle school students (Turner & Lapan, 2002, p.53)**

**-Provide your child with exposure to individuals or experiences that challenge gender stereotyping of careers**

**-Encourage and help your child to arrange career-related learning experiences such as job shadowing and informational interviews**

**-Encourage your child to explore a variety of careers, especially those that are relevant to his/her growing interests and potential – be a resource that facilitates networking and making connection to other resources (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003, p.38)**

**-Help your child to find worthy role models both inside of and extending beyond the family (Hurd, Zimmerman, & Xue, 2009, p. 788) - matched role models in terms of gender and/or race have been shown to have a particularly powerful impact**

**-Get involved in the reflection process following career assessments – help your child interpret his/her results in a meaningful way and develop next steps (and follow up on these too!)**

**-Help your child to achieve broader positive community youth development outcomes by helping him/her find a way to contribute to the community while learning about careers and themselves so that both will benefit**

The following websites provide additional information specifically for parents on career development of youth:

<http://www.dacc.edu/career/ParentGuideforCareerPlanning.pdf>

<http://www2.careers.govt.nz/plan-your-career/helping-young-people-make-decisions/>

[http://www.fldoe.org/workforce/pdf/parent\\_primer06.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/workforce/pdf/parent_primer06.pdf)

<http://alis.alberta.ca/ep/eps/tips/tips.html?EK=142>

[http://www.ccdf.ca/ccdf/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/a\\_career\\_development\\_resource\\_for\\_parents\\_e.pdf](http://www.ccdf.ca/ccdf/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/a_career_development_resource_for_parents_e.pdf)

<http://www.careervision.org/resources/parents.htm>

<http://associationdatabase.com/aws/NCDA/pt/sp/resources>

## References

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