



Be your child's career champion. Part 1 for ages 11-16

**Guidance and suggestions to help you start
career conversations with your teenager**



Denise Taylor, Career Psychologist with Amazing People

Career Coaching Advice for Parents

Providing practical guidance and suggestions to help you to help your child.

The world has changed, with the dramatic rise in university fees and the highly competitive nature of getting a good job as parents we need to see how to help our children make effective choices.

The most important person in your child's life is you, and you will be the person they first turn to for advice and guidance in their studies and careers.

You can help them at different stages of their life. I have 2 booklets to help

- This one is aimed at young people ages 11 -16
- A separate book aimed at young people at 16+ (not yet completed)

In this guide I'm going to focus on how you work with them through their teens, with a focus on ages 11-16.

I can help at different stages of a young person's life, and can help you be an effective guide to your child too.

'Parents are the single greatest influence on their children's education and career decision making.'

Looking to the future

The world of work has changed; no longer can you climb a career ladder with one company. Jobs are changing so fast that how you earn your living in 10 years may be in a job that doesn't even exist now.

Even if the job does exist, you have to keep yourself up to date. The punch card operator from 30 years ago had to retrain. The experienced marketing manager who knows nothing on social media is likely to find him/herself unemployable.

That's why you can help you child understand more about their strengths and abilities, their passions and interests and develop relevant skills to keep them marketable so if the job ceases to exist, or they want to move on they understand what makes them special.

Early Teens: Age 11-14

Help them to understand their strengths and weaknesses

Focus more on what they are good at rather than put far too much energy into weak areas. The one exception is maths. In many jobs a Grade C or above is essential, so (if required) extra help in this area is likely to be beneficial.

Give specific and positive feedback on strengths

Too often we discount things, thinking that because something comes easy to us that everyone can do this. Help your child to apply and celebrate their strengths.

Does your child have artistic or musical talents, a real flair for sports, much happier working on practical tasks? All of these can lead to a great job, it's not just about academic subjects.

Strengths spotting

A really great activity is to look out for strengths, in all family members. Showing kindness, being organised, taking time to listen, or quickly understanding a problem.

Start reviewing things you all do and making a note of the things you do well. It's much easier to work with strengths than to focus on weaknesses (with the exception of maths, you must get a grade C GCSE at a minimum).

How best does your child learn?

Not everyone learns best through reading but some may learn better through listening, either in class or using audio books. We may love creating mind maps but these don't work for all, perhaps they are happiest with list making? Helping them to understand how best they learn will increase their chance of success through learning.

Career discussions

It's never too early to start thinking of careers, and it can be helpful to have discussions on the type of work you and your friends do and to suggest some relevant website such as

- www.fasttomato.co.uk
- www.plotr.co.uk and especially the quiz - www.plotr.co.uk/career-advice-quiz/

Children can absorb negative energy

Don't mock or criticise any career ideas they may have as it might stop them pursuing something that they are really interested in but need some support. Encourage their exploration, don't shoot down ideas but encourage them to find out more.

Life skills

This is a good time to start learning life skills through participation in guides, scouts etc and taking up other opportunities offered by schools, see next page.

Developing life skills – at all ages

Certain skills are needed in almost every job such as

- Working well in a team
- Communicating with adults
- Being determined
- Solving problems
- Organising myself
- Organising others
- Competence in Maths
- Competence in English
- Improving my vocabulary
- Using technology
- Dealing with set backs
- Working with difficult people
- Setting goals
- Working towards goals

These can be developed through

- Studies
- Duke of Edinburgh award scheme
- Volunteering
- Hobby
- Part time job
- Helping a family member e.g. get their business on Facebook
- Helping out at home

What other ways can you think of?

The GCSE Years: Age 15-16

As our teenagers are working towards GCSEs we can continue to encourage learning, encourage curiosity, and exploring. Together we can work out the best way they learn and support them in gaining effective study techniques.

This is the perfect time to take the [Highland Ability Battery](#) and the information gained will be useful to improve study skills, understand strengths and increase self-esteem.

Continue to encourage them develop basic life skills, involvement in clubs, part time work or volunteering can develop interpersonal and team working skills.

This can be a good time to introduce budgeting and money management skills.

This is a critical time for students making future career and educational decisions, they will be working towards GCSEs and beginning to consider A levels and other 16+ options. Make sure that their children are aware of all their options and seek to identify how to increase their chance of success.

Post 16 options

The Education and Skills Act, 2008 increased the minimum age at which young people in England can leave full time learning to 17 from 2013 and until their 18th birthday from 2015.

Raising the participation age (RPA) does not mean that young people must stay in school, there are other options

- * Full time education at school, college or home education studying A levels, As levels, basic/key skills, diplomas, GCSEs or vocational qualifications
- * Apprenticeships or other work based learning
- * Part time education or training if employed

Parents approach me to help their children make choices of post 16 education. Particularly for 'all-rounders' there is a need to make the right choices for A levels that do not cut off options. It can also be helpful for those who don't get excited by anything to identify where to focus their energy, and identify goals for the next year or so.

What is a great job?

An educational psychologist has said that we need to think of work that is expressed manually, rather than verbally as **qualitatively different, not quantitatively different, of lesser difficulty**. She said that she will often see children, usually boys, who are very skilled spatially, visually or kinaesthetically but are miserable in schools, particularly in language arts.

If properly supported they can become excellent plumbers, surgeons, violin makers, chefs, builders, architects, carpenters, graphic artists, construction workers, vets, repair people computer techs. It does get hard for them when their strengths are not even acknowledged let alone challenged and developed.

Vocational technical education has been seen as something for students who have less potential, rather than for those with different potential.

Using the [Highlands Ability Battery](#) will also help to identify young people who are more spatially skilled.

Study Skills

Making sure your child has effective study skills will help. It can help to identify what is their preferred learning style - reading, doing etc. This will be identified through the [Highlands Ability Battery](#), but self-assessment can also be helpful.

As babies we learn through sounds and then begin to learn via watching and touch. As we reach 4 or 5 and learn to read we can learn from books, and later through images and numbers and movement.

To learn effectively we should learn to convert materials presented in a form which is weaker to us into one that is stronger.

Also consider if your child gets overly anxious with exams and seek out ways to improve study technique.

Verbal memory – learn through reading

- Refer to and use written materials
- Encourage others to communicate with you in writing
- Put your notes and memos in writing

Tonal memory – listening

- Listen to others in preference to reading
- Record what you are listening to
- Communicate face to face
- Include some music in your life

Design memory – images and diagrams

- Use PowerPoint, graphs, charts and colours
- Useful in scientific, engineering and artistic work
- Reduce data to outlines and graphs

Rhythm memory – movement and action

- Incorporate movement in learning
- Engage in tasks requiring agility
- Relax by participating in sports and dance

Number memory – numbers

- Reduce things you learn to lists
- All facts are remembered equally

How much are you helping your teenager with their course work?

I know parents want to do the best for their children and many parents are very proactive in helping their teenager with assignments and paying for additional tuition.

BUT you may like to consider if the good results are down to your involvement. How will they cope at university if they are not a self-starter and their A*s are not a true reflection of their ability and personal drive.

There is plenty of help that can be offered on developing good study habits and these will help set your child up to be able to be an effective student at University.

Smartphones may be ruining the sleep of UK teenagers

A University of Hertfordshire academic found that the blue light emitted from smartphones and tablets affected sleep quality. Texting and checking social media accounts on their smartphone or tablet before going to sleep each will expose them to the blue light emitted from these devices, causing problems with sleep, a new survey has found. Richard Wiseman said "The blue light from these devices suppresses the production of the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin, so it's important to avoid them before bed time."

How Can Parents Help?

The last thing you want to do is sit your son and daughter down for 'the conversation'. Far better to keep it light.

Most teenagers have only vague ideas for the future but are seeking some guidance and suggestions.

Here are some great ideas of questions to ask.

Allow time for your teenager to think of a reply. Don't push them to answer right away. Given them space.

Career conversations - Career ideas

It can be useful to have discussions with your teenager and discuss

- What do they love to do?
- What are their passions and interests? For example working with their hands, sports, being creative?
- What do they want to learn more about?
- What do they dream of?

You could suggest that they make a note of **everything** that interests them -

- Books they read
- Films and TV programmes they watch
- What they like to talk about
- How they have fun

From this they can put together a comprehensive list of everything they get enthusiastic about.

You could ask them

- Could you imagine working for yourself?
- Do you want to work outside, in an office? Working with people? Working with things? Working with data?
- Attitudes to money

Talk to them about how you made your career choices and encourage them to ask questions of people they meet such as your friends and members of e.g. your local church or sports group.

They could find out more:

- What their job involves
- What they like and dislike
- What education is needed to work in that area
- Any advice they'd give you if it does interest you

Career conversations - Values

You can't find out what you want until you find out who you are so useful questions to ask include

- What are your values?
- What's most important to you?
- What do you really want out of life?
- How do you want your friends and family to remember you?

Work is a very important part of most people's lives, but it is only one part. You can start now, asking your child to think about

- What do you want your life and lifestyle to be like?
- What kind of work-life balance you're looking for?

This will provide a context for their career choices.

Career conversations - Relationships

You probably already know but it's useful to talk about how your teenager prefers to relate with people. Are they outgoing or quieter and reserved for example.

This can lead to different career options. For example if they want to work with people they could use listening skills, sales skills, negotiating skills, a focus on the customer etc. Roles could range from counsellor to sales consultant.

Don't expect answers right away, and don't cover all of this in one session. Far better to drop questions into a conversation as e.g. you are driving and to give your teen some space to reflect if needed.

You can return to these questions at different points in your child's life.

Here are some tips for talking to your teenager about his or her dreams.

1. **Don't rush to judgment.** Don't discount ideas or say they are impractical or unachievable. Far better they begin to have some ideas which can be explored.
2. **Suspect pat answers.** To say they want to go to Warwick to study medicine, might make you feel happy they've made a good choice but where has this idea come from? Has the desire to become a doctor come from real experience (working with sick people, a love of biology, family experience) or only because it seemed the best way to earn prestige?
3. **Welcome complicated hazy, half-thought-out answers.** A vague idea is a great starting point, and you can support them to find out more so they can decide for them self is this is something worth pursuing.
4. **Encourage hands-on experience.** What teenagers experience for themselves will have much more impact than what you tell them; volunteering, or even paid work in areas they are interested in will help solidify good ideas and help them understand why other fields may be wrong for them.
5. **Be a role model of someone who loves their job.** Almost all teenagers will eventually adopt the values and career examples of their parents. If you love what you do, that is an example your teenager will emulate.
6. **Help your child pay attention to what he or she is really interested in.** They are more likely to be successful in their studies and work if they follow a career path that interests them.
7. **As you watch TV** talk about the work that the characters undertake and ask questions about working in hospitals (Casualty) or Law enforcement (any crime show)

How to get career guidance

You may be lucky and get sufficient support from your school, but many people find the school provision limited.

This question and answer from John Clare who answers questions on the Education page in the Daily Telegraph is worth reading.

"I don't know whether my school is unusual, but the career department seems to do little to ease the passage from sixth form to university. Careers guidance is little more than a shallow computer based questionnaire that is supposed to predict your future, and choosing a university is just an invitation to browse the UCAS web site.

Your experience is depressingly common, careers advice is a haphazard activity in most schools, and it is shocking how little help youngsters receive in making decisions that could affect the rest of their lives.

Parents should not expect schools to guide their children's choice of career. With rare exceptions – despite all claims to the contrary, schools and their careers consultants are not equipped, and do not have the expertise, to offer worthwhile advice.

A superficial "psychometric" test, accompanied by a quick chat and an invitation to "look in the careers library" or "check out the Internet" is all that most pupils can expect.

At 18, the majority leave school without a clear idea of how they want to earn their living, and a large proportion are in much the same position when they graduate.

This is a good time for proper psychometric testing. It helps young people to focus on what they are good at and enjoy doing; and it opens their eyes to the full range of occupations that, given their abilities and aptitudes, are worth considering.

Would a career coach help?

Think about how much it costs to raise a child? How much will it potentially cost to go to university? A career coach experienced at working with young people will ensure that any choices are well thought through and increase your son/daughters confidence level.

I help young people through career coaching either alone or combined with highly reputable assessments.

I also work with students and graduates, coaching them to create a job search strategy, plan ways to enhance their CV and much more.

What's very helpful in this age group is the Highlands Ability Battery and the Strong Interest Inventory (focused at making choices for 14+ or 16+). The [Highlands Ability Battery](#) is an **in-depth ability assessment** with a series of 'work samples' helps you to understand what comes easy to you and you can build a career around these strengths.

Read on for more details.

Taking Psychometric Assessments

Highlands Ability Battery

An assessment to measure natural abilities is perfect from age 15 as it will identify natural abilities and help with making choices for A levels etc.

"The individual, who knows his own aptitudes, and their relative strengths, chooses more intelligently among the world's host of opportunities." Johnson O'Connor, 1940 p134

This can be as helpful for young people who have no idea what to do as well as those who are keen to commit to medicine, architecture etc. The assessment will confirm a choice or make suggestions.

We all have talents and abilities we are born with. These give us a special ability to do things easily and a reason why we can find other things difficult. We develop this ability through heredity and in childhood and our abilities can be measured from age 14.

Because they are hard wired abilities do not change. Practice won't make them stronger and ignoring them won't mean we lose them. They differ from skills, which we can develop, but which we can also lose, and interests which can change. However, both skills and interests can enhance our abilities.

Aptitude testing can provide a student with some indication as to which careers would ultimately be more satisfying and enjoyable. Research has shown that people working in a field that provides an outlet for as many of their aptitudes as possible tend to be happier and more satisfied in their work than those who do not.

The Highlands Ability Battery (HAB) comprises 19 separate validated objective tests. **The HAB isolates natural abilities and analyses combinations of aptitudes in addition to individual aptitudes.** It is an objective measure of your relative ability to do specific things from solving problems to remembering what you read. It tells you what you'll find easy, what will be difficult and is the foundation to effective career choice.

The Highlands Ability Battery will also assess the 5 learning abilities. In this photo a young Tibetan boy is learning to write using verbal memory. Depending on his natural ability pattern his education will also draw on number, design, tonal and rhythm memories. When a student can learn what their optimum learning abilities are, school becomes easier and more fun.



Taking The Highlands Ability Battery at different ages

You only take this assessment once so the investment is still useful throughout your child's life. Follow up discussions can revisit results dependent on current requirements.

Age 15/16

This is the perfect time to take the Highlands Ability Battery. This will identify natural abilities and help young people be more effective in their GCSE studies.

At 16/17

Take the Highlands Ability Battery now to help choose or confirm choices for University or post 18 options.

University students - 1st year

Some university students struggle. They feel overwhelmed by the work and may be considering dropping out. We need to understand the problem - is it the wrong course or the wrong university.

Others are now keen to start planning what to do after University and the Highlands Assessment can help identify career paths that match natural ability or to e.g. choose between specialist areas within medicine.

University students - 2nd and 3rd year

Given the investment in time and money spent on going to University, young people will benefit by taking the Highlands Assessment, alongside a measure of personality and interests to narrow down choices and aid applying for jobs. There is still time to gain relevant work experience to enhance a CV.

The assessment can help identify the best working environment. For example they may be on target for a degree in marketing but should also consider if they should seek out a job in the hospitality industry or a software company.

On Graduation

If not sure what to do next the temptation is to opt for a further degree. Or the graduate may have so many ideas and interests that they don't know which to choose. The knowledge gained from an understanding of aptitudes can help narrow down such options, providing direction to aid evaluation of job options and future goals. It can be helpful to include assessments of interest and personality alongside career and job search coaching, plus career and job search coaching.

Hollands Theory of career choice – which underpins the Strong Interest Inventory

The theory loosely states that both people and occupations can be categorised into 6 types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional.



Realistic – Building, repairing, working outdoors

This category contains occupations undertaken by people who like **realistic work environments** and prefer activities that are **practical and concrete**. Their interests are likely to involve physical exertion, knowledge of mechanical principles or manual dexterity.

They enjoy working outdoors, working with tools and machines and using physical skills in general. People who score high on this theme prefer dealing with things rather than with ideas or people. They often seek careers relating to **nature** and the **outdoors, mechanics, athletics, skilled trades, construction** or **military service**. *People who are high on Realistic are often described as frank, genuine, honest, materialistic, natural and practical.*



Investigative – researching, analysing, inquiring

This category contains occupations undertaken by people who like **investigative environments** and prefer activities that are **scientific and intellectual**. Their interests include reading technical articles, solving challenging problems.

They enjoy gathering information, uncovering new facts or theories and analyzing and interpreting data. People who score high on this theme, like to think through problems and enjoys challenges. They often seek careers relating to **science, maths, academic research, medical facilities, health** or **computer-related industries**. *People who are high on Investigative are often described as analytical, critical, curious, independent, methodical, rational.*



Artistic – creating or enjoying art, drama, music, writing

This category contains occupations undertaken by people who like **artistic environments** value aesthetic qualities and like opportunities for self-expression.

They prefer **unstructured and flexible environments** and often seek work relating to art, music, drama, writing, cooking, library science and museum work. *People who are high on Artistic are often described as complicated, disorderly, expressive, non conforming and original.*



Social – helping, instructing, care giving

This category contains occupations undertaken by people who like **social environments** and prefer activities that involve working with people to inform, train, cure or develop them in some way.

They **enjoy working in groups, sharing responsibilities and communicating with others**. They often seek careers relating to education, healthcare, psychology, social work and counselling. *People who are high on Social are often described as cooperative, generous, patient, responsible and understanding.*



Enterprising – selling, managing, persuading

This category contains occupations undertaken by people who like **enterprising environments** and enjoy **influencing, leading or managing others** for organisational goals or for economic success.

They enjoy persuading others to their viewpoint and prefer social tasks where they can assume leadership. They often seek careers relating to **business management, sales or politics, management or law** *People who are high on Enterprising are often described as adventurous, ambitious, domineering, optimistic and sociable.*



Conventional – accounting, organising, processing data

This category contains occupations undertaken by people who like **conventional environments** and enjoy **systematic activities** requiring attention to accuracy and detail, often associated with office work.

They enjoy working for large organisations and are comfortable with an established chain of command. They often seek work relating to **financial institutions, accounting firms, data management or clerical activities**. *People who are high on Conventional are often described as conforming, conscientious, efficient, obedient and practical.*

Find out more about how you match up with these categories through the 291 question Strong Interest Inventory. Separate reports available to help make choices for 16+ and also for university course choice.

Strong Interest Inventory for 14+ choices - [read more here.](#)

About Dr Denise Taylor



Denise is a well-known career coach, regularly featured on radio and in print. She was a regular on Radio 5Live answering questions on the Phil William's phone in show. In November 2008 she was featured on ITV's Tonight Programme, helping unemployed people get a job. An advocate for life-long learning, Denise gained her doctorate in 2021 researching transitions and meaning in life, focused on retirement but relevant across the ages.

Denise is the author of 9 books including: 'How To Get A Job In A Recession' (2nd edition, October 2011; 1st edition, March 2009), 'Winning Interview Answers For First Time Job Seekers' (October 2009), 'Now You've Been Shortlisted' (February 2010) and Get The Job You Want (January 2013), and 'Find Work at 50+', 2016.

Denise offers a very personal career service, working with individuals from 14 up who want in making education choices help in finding a career which matches abilities, interests, values, and more. She won a **National Career Award for the Gold Career Programme in November 2007**. She also helps clients with all aspects of job search - CVs, interview coaching and assessment centre prep. She won a **2nd National Career Award for the Job Search Support Programme in November 2009**.

Denise is a Chartered Psychologist, Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society and Registered Professional with the Career Development Institute. She has a MBA and worked at Assistant Director level within Royal Mail thus able to effectively support clients at Director Level. She has a real passion for working with people at the start of their career, including Pre University so they make effective choices for university and are well paid for a great first job.

Denise has worked with well over 1000 personal clients, and also works as a consultant working on assessment centres with companies as diverse as The Cabinet Office and EDF.

Visit <http://www.amazingpeople.co.uk> for more details of the services Denise provides - career coaching, job search support, assessments, eBooks and more.

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