

Chapter 1: Career Planning A Mentor's Guide

“We are each gifted in a unique and important way. It is our privilege and our adventure to discover our own special light.”

— Mary Dunbar

Starting the Conversation

Facilitating a conversation about career paths with a youth can be challenging. Often kids have an extremely hard time coming up with an answer to the question, “What do you want to do when you grow up?” Some have known “forever” what they want to be, while others have no idea what possibilities exist for them. Remember that choosing a career can take a lot of time and exploration, and seldom is an individual’s first choice of career what they eventually end up doing. Additionally, most people will have 3–5 careers over their lifetime.

The focus of career planning is not to force one career choice, but rather to come up with several options to explore. As adults, we are full of many “truths” garnered from our life experience. When coaching a youth through the career planning process, your initial role is to put your personal values and preconceived ideas on the back burner and *listen* to what the youth is thinking. Their ideas may come easily or you may have to work very hard to draw them out.

We’ve broken down some simple messages about career planning that can get you started on this important conversation. Take a moment to read over the document labeled **Career Planning Messages**. Try to come up with some stories from your own your experience that make these messages come to life for the youth.

Thinking About the Future

Have your mentee complete the exercise entitled **Envisioning Your Future**. Ask them to imagine what they would like people to say about them later in life. It might be a fun bonding experience for you to complete this exercise as well, and share your responses.

The **Career Exploration Tool** begins to get more specific about likes and dislikes related to careers. Based on this exercise, did any new career themes come up? As a mentor, what types of jobs do you think of when you think of this individual? Add any new ideas to the list of career paths to consider.

In addition to this exercise, you might ask the youth to talk to their trusted friends and allies, to see what others believe that their talents, strengths, and goals are. Thinking about strengths and talents can be helpful in narrowing down the best career options.

Gathering Information

The website www.cacareerzone.org is a great tool that can assist you with exploring career options. There is another simple assessment tool, labeled “Assess Yourself” that can help get the conversation rolling. Learn about jobs that fit the youth’s interest areas and explore the career ideas that their peers and allies have suggested. This website provides information about salary, educational requirements, occupational outlook, work environment, and skills required for various positions. Many of the jobs listed also have a short video about the specific position.

Talking to People

A great way to learn more about careers is to conduct informational interviews. Print out the form labeled **Informational Interviewing**. Informational interviewing is a process of gathering career advice and information by talking with people knowledgeable about a particular job or industry. Questioning someone currently active in the field, allows youth to gain real-time information on industries, companies and job functions. The data gathered from the interviews will help the participant to have “insider information” about what it is like to work in a specific industry or job and to determine if it is a good match.

We highly encourage participants to do this research prior to choosing a college major or training program. If the career is the right choice, then the youth will likely feel more motivated in their studies. If the career is not the best choice, this will save time and the headache of changing gears midway through their education or training.

Education and Training Options

The San Francisco Bay Area offers an amazing array of educational options and training providers. There are many public and private educational institutions that provide degrees and certificates, excellent technical schools that provide specific training for careers, as well as apprenticeship programs offering hands-on training in a trade, while earning a salary.

We highly encourage mentors to work with their youth to consider all of the training options available. While college provides a pathway to many jobs, it is not the only option. Youth that have struggled in school may find the option of short-term training or an apprenticeship a better fit. Also, the cost and time commitment required to earn a degree may also be prohibitive. Bear in mind that some of the career options available through short-term training and apprenticeship may provide a salary equal or greater than those requiring a college degree.

Whatever their career choice, it is absolutely critical for all youth the finish high school. If there is a point of time which you believe that your youth is at risk of dropping out, please access **[Are You Thinking About Dropping Out of High School?](#)** to provide talking points to discourage this decision.