

# Three Steps to a Career Pathway: Tips for Parents

Career pathway strategies support a young adult's progress from education into and through the world of work. Career pathways span high school and college and are a combination of education and training, work-based learning, and support services that lead to employment and advancement in a specific industry or occupation. A career pathway is both reaching the goal of employment in a chosen field, and the education, work, and planning that goes into achieving that goal. Career pathways also set the stage for career advancement.

**Self-exploration, career exploration, and career planning** activities in grades 9 to 12 are the steps to helping students identify and prepare for a career pathway in a field that matches their strengths and interests.

1

## **Self-exploration:**

What are my strengths? How does my disability impact me?

2

## **Career exploration:**

What kind of work do I want to do?

3

## **Career planning:**

What are the steps I need to take to reach my career goals?

## **Step 1: Self-exploration**

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Youth must consider their strengths and interests in order to find a career that is a good fit. Assessments such as interest inventories or skills assessments can help youth discover possible career paths that match their interests and skills.

Interest inventories and other self-awareness activities can be completed as part of a youth's middle and high school programming.

Part of self-exploration for youth includes understanding their disability and how it impacts them. Being able to talk about their disability and the accommodations they may need on the job is an important self-advocacy skill. Youth may need to disclose their disability and request accommodations in order to meet the essential requirements of the job. Parents and Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams should consider including self-advocacy goals in students' IEPs to help ensure they are ready to advocate for themselves in a workplace setting.

## **Step 2: Career exploration**

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There are many strategies to help youth explore careers, such as career research and experiential learning. Hands-on, work-based learning experiences are key in helping students find out what they truly enjoy.

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When helping youth and young adults research possible careers, parents should expose them to career clusters (groups of careers within a common field such as agriculture, health, or business) and find out the skills and education requirements needed for their areas of interest. Help youth answer these questions:

- What skills are needed?
- What personal qualities are required for success?
- What postsecondary education or training is necessary?

Experiential or work-based learning is key to meaningful career exploration. Examples include informational interviews, job shadowing, volunteer experiences, and internships. Students who participate in hands-on work-based learning experiences are better able to reflect on their experiences and figure out what they enjoy doing and the skill set needed for their careers of interest.

## **Step 3: Career planning**

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After youth have identified possible careers of interest, the final step is career planning. Activities such as resume-writing and interview practice will assist students in their future endeavors. Youth will also need to make a plan for any further education, job experiences, and support services necessary to work in their chosen field. Previously completed career exploration activities help youth develop a more focused career plan. Parents can help youth create an action plan that is a path to a desired career.

Career planning activities may include career-related volunteering, internships, applying for entry-level positions, and applying for admissions to postsecondary education or training program-focused activities where students are actively implementing their career plan. Career planning activities can also document how to address disability-related accommodations, health care, or transportation needs.

Career planning helps youth map out their short- and long-term career goals, as well as the education and support, needed to reach them. Such activities are core career pathway activities because they focus on activities related to job-seeking and learning opportunities that continue after high school graduation. Writing out a student's future education and training needs facilitates a smooth transition to employment and also enables youth to see how to advance to higher levels of employment within their chosen field.

Following these three steps will help youth with disabilities successfully identify and begin a rewarding career pathway that reflects their strengths, interests, and abilities.