

Guide: How to Talk with Youth About Careers

Join youth where they are:

- Express interest in **self-discovery**.
- Value **relationships**, both online and in-person.
- Show **confidence and hope** in them for their future careers.
- Share tips and **resources** supporting career exploration.
- Provide opportunities for **new experiences and network connections**.

Connect with their **challenges**, **changes**, and **choices**

CHALLENGES

Notice common challenges for many youth: getting initial work experience, followed by networking; developing specific work-related skills; and writing a resume or cover letter.

CHANGES

Acknowledge they will likely have many job changes in their career journey.

Honor the importance of early work experiences and their relevance.

CHOICES

Prepare for conversations that involve multiple post-secondary options.

Share time and technologies to aide exploration of career options and preparation.



Connect with Youth's Challenges, Changes, and Choices

CHALLENGES

Notice the common challenges for many youth: getting initial work experience, followed by networking; developing specific work-related skills; and writing a resume or cover letter.

As much time as we spend helping youth explore careers, attention should be given to **help youth get their foot in the door, land their first jobs, and begin building their Career Literacy and Network Strength.** Youth with work experience, including part-time jobs, are:

- More confident they will meet their goals,
- More likely to have taken active steps to research and prepare for a career, and
- More interested in educating themselves about their options.

CHANGES

Acknowledge their focus on change.

Recognize their strategy to earn more is to change jobs. Appeal to this desire to change, even if it is only laterally, to **help youth reflect on what they learn in each new work experience.** Speak with them about the skills and work activities they have learned by having worked in each different place. Notice early work experiences can take place in different places from babysitting to fast food; school stores to summer internships.

Honor the importance of early work experiences.

Capitalize on their interest to have more rewarding work, make more money, hold a leadership or managing role, or have more control over their schedule when they are in the first entry-level jobs. This is a good time to **help youth research options for additional schooling or training needed to take the next step** toward what they now seek.

CHOICES

Prepare for conversations that involve multiple post-secondary options.

Understand they want to hear about alternatives to four-year college. **Help youth identify resources** for credentialing programs, apprenticeships, military, entrepreneurship, first work experiences, two-year college degrees, and career and technical programs.

Share time and technologies to aide exploration of career options and preparation.

Youth are online and most likely on mobile devices. Recognize where they are and point youth to quality resources on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok that can help with career exploration. Combine online Career Literacy-building technologies with opportunities for in-person engagement with parents, other trusted adults, and peers. Talk about the career exploration and preparation choices they are making.

Finding	Description
1 Youth are confident and may not believe they need help.	Overwhelmingly, 90% of youth are at least somewhat confident they will attain their career goals. This confidence holds up regardless of race, class, educational attainment, or identity. That is their starting place.
2 Despite this confidence, youth face significant challenges right now.	The leading challenges in this generation involve mental health, dealing with inflation, and the rising cost of living. One practical outcome of this strain is that young people focus more on seeking jobs that pay well and express more interest in jobs that account for mental health e.g., flexible hours, mental health breaks, and insurance that covers mental health costs.
3 Youth do not see opportunity in the current “employee’s market”, nor do they look for career choices and how to prepare.	Unemployment is down in this country and many employers struggle to fill jobs. However, youth still struggle, in large measure because they believe the jobs available to them do not pay enough. When it comes to deciding on a career or occupation, less than half of youth in our survey have researched their potential earnings, figured out qualifications needed for a job, or even researched a job online.
4 This generation is historically diverse.	Less than half of youth in our country are white and a growing number (23% in this study) identify as LGBTQ+. Any outreach must account for this diversity. However, LGBTQ+ youth in our research have basically the same career goals and expectations as other youth, just as youth of color express the same goals as white youth.
5 Youth have a distinct set of strengths and values. They also have some self-ascribed weaknesses.	Youth describe themselves as tolerant and inclusive. They convey strong confidence about their ability to change the world. They also project a real entrepreneurial spirit, reflecting the existence of an increasingly open marketplace on social media. At the same time, they are the first to admit their reliance on social media—74% spend four hours or more per day online—and recognize that social media is a primary source of mental and social anxiety.
6 Youth view the world through a 3-inch screen.	A significant number of youth say they would not bother exploring an issue if they could not use their phone. When it comes to researching jobs, youth are more likely to use phone-friendly platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram.
7 Youth have a more nuanced view of college and the “necessity” of a four-year degree.	Youth are not necessarily inclined to incur a six-figure student debt to “discover” themselves in college. Rather, their approach to college is transactional; if they are interested in a career that requires a degree (e.g., engineering), they will pay the cost. However, many youth are interested in careers that do not require a degree.
8 Young people will change their jobs and possibly careers frequently.	Over half (52%) of youth say that one should stay at a job for no more than 3 years before moving on. For some, this frequency reflects a recognition of a rapidly evolving market, where technological change creates new jobs and extinguishes old ones. Other youth look to lateral job movement as a strategy for increasing income and benefits, as they hunt for better pay in a difficult economy.
9 Work experience is paramount and too often overlooked.	Youth with experience are more confident they will achieve their career goals, are more interested in researching future careers, and do a better job preparing for a career. Some youth learn invaluable work-related skills and habits in their first job; others learn what they do not want to do and are inspired to prepare themselves for more rewarding work.
10 Youth are also interested in self-discovery.	Six years and three waves of this specific research, testing tools, surveys, and messages, have taught us that youth are interested in discovering themselves and understanding how their unique interests and strengths can apply to their careers. The DeBruce Foundation believes engaging them on this journey of discovery is the starting point to helping youth expand their career pathways.

Read the Full Research Report

How to Talk with Youth About Careers

This groundbreaking study, conducted from June to October 2023, delves into the experiences, aspirations, and challenges of young people ages 16 to 24 in America. Building on similar research conducted in 2019 and 2021, this report focuses on best practices for engaging with young people on matters related to their careers and preparation for them.



The Foundation makes resources available to partner organizations focused on developing people as they gain confidence, career insights, and networks essential to employment empowerment.

To learn more about our partnerships, visit www.DeBruce.org.

