



The Road Ahead

CAREER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Challenges of career development*

The need for early opportunities for career planning, especially for girls, is strongly supported in the research literature on gifted education. There are a number of issues that may make career development challenging for students who are gifted. These could include the following.

- *Multipotentiality*
Many young people who are gifted have multiple passions or talents, and it can be difficult to identify and/or decide on a career path that will accommodate these diverse interests.
- *Personal investment*
The types of careers that many individuals who are gifted tend to aspire to often require extensive post-secondary training. Such education often involves great personal, social and financial costs.
- *Geographical and socio-economic mobility*
For many young people who are gifted, particularly those from rural areas, pursuing the occupations they are interested in means having to leave their home communities. This can create conflicted feelings.

- *Expectations of others*
The career expectations of parents, teachers and peers can exert tremendous pressure on young people who are gifted.
- *Innovativeness*
Many new career options are the direct result of the ingenuity of individuals who are gifted. For example, the field of bio-mechanical engineering did not exist until someone combined interests in biology, mechanics and engineering. Technological breakthroughs are constantly making new career paths possible. If necessary, individuals who are gifted need to be prepared to “invent” their own careers. However, combining several disciplines into one career path requires greater investment than focusing on a single discipline.

Career development components

Dr. Michael Pyryt, of the Centre for Gifted Education at the University of Calgary, proposes a number of essential career development components for students who are gifted. They include the following.

* Pyryt, M. “Career Education for the Gifted: Complexities and Recommendations” in *The Alberta Counsellor*, Volume 24, November 1, Spring 1998. pp. 13–17.

- *Self-awareness and self-concept development*
Individuals who are gifted can make thoughtful career choices by developing awareness of their personal aptitudes and interests. Tools for enhancing self-awareness include standardized personality inventories, such as Holland's Vocational Preference Inventory, or informed questionnaires, such as the Career Issues Survey.
- *Overcoming sex-role stereotypes*
It is important that young people who are gifted, particularly young women, develop positive expectations for success in their future career path. There are a number of techniques for encouraging girls to broaden their thinking about career options, such as providing mentors, and same-sex career days for young women.
- *Creative problem solving*
Training young people in creative problem solving can build their capacity for dealing with career-related challenges such as the need for a high degree of personal investment and geographic mobility. One popular creative problem-solving model consists of the following stages:
 - fact finding
 - problem finding
 - idea finding
 - solution finding, and
 - acceptance finding.
- *Interpersonal effectiveness*
An effective style of communicating can help individuals who are gifted handle the many social and professional situations they will face in their careers. They need to develop assertiveness, flexibility, empathy, and awareness of their own feelings.
- *Time and stress management*
These skills can help individuals who are gifted cope with challenges of personal investment, geographic mobility and the expectations of others. Young people need to learn a variety of strategies so they can choose what works best for them.
- *Content acceleration*
Allowing young people who are gifted to accelerate their education is one way to reduce the heavy time and financial commitments required to pursue many professions. Potential opportunities for acceleration include early entrance to university, part-time university course work, distance education, Advanced Placement, and acceleration in a specific subject area or at a specific grade level.

These essential components of career development can help young people who are gifted to overcome some of the challenges that they may face. In addition, young people need to develop inspiration, courage and perseverance to begin making the many decisions involved in career planning.

The High Five Messages of Career Development*

We live in changing, challenging and uncertain times. To help guide your child as he or she builds a career, there are five important messages you can convey. These messages are called the High Five Messages of Career Development.

Follow your heart

Let your dreams shape your goals so that you go after what you really want.

Change is constant

Adaptability is one of the most important skills you will carry throughout your journey.

* The High Five Messages of Career Development were developed by a number of Canadian career development specialists, and validated by Helen Hackett, John McCormick, Aryeh Gitterman, Michele Tocher, Pat Butter, Donna Davidson and Tracy Lamb.

Team up with others

Your friends, family and teachers can be valuable resources in helping you achieve your goals.

Focus on the journey

Life is not a destination; it is an exciting trip with many directions and goals that may change.

Learning is ongoing

The end of school does not mean the end of learning. Opportunities to learn are all around—take advantage of them.

Understanding and following these key career messages can help children develop:

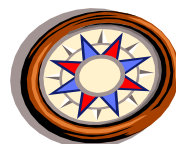
- resiliency
- the courage to welcome change as an opportunity to learn
- the ability to adapt to various situations
- the willingness and capacity to share problems and solutions with others.

Follow your heart: exploring interests and setting goals

Many of the interests and abilities that your child possesses will be manifested in activities by the end of elementary school. Keeping track of children's changing interests, goals and dreams is an important early step in career planning. It may be a good idea to keep a written record of your child's interests and even samples of written work or art pieces for future reflection. Once in junior or senior high school, encourage your child to maintain this kind of record for him or herself.

Some children who are gifted show an early passion for a particular occupation. These children can be nurtured and supported as they strive for their chosen career. However, it is important to recognize that other children will show an interest in and potential for a number of career options. These individuals, who are equally talented in several areas (also known as having multipotentiality), may experience "overchoice" syndrome or an inability to make a decision.

In addition to developing their unique abilities and talents, children who are gifted also need to be encouraged to develop decision-making skills, and to learn that life is sometimes about finding a middle ground. Setting realistic and meaningful goals is an important part of the career development process. By encouraging your child to set attainable goals, you can help him or her to create a sense of purpose and personal success. Setting goals for post-secondary education and careers also gives children and teens an opportunity to exercise existing skills and talents while identifying and building new ones.

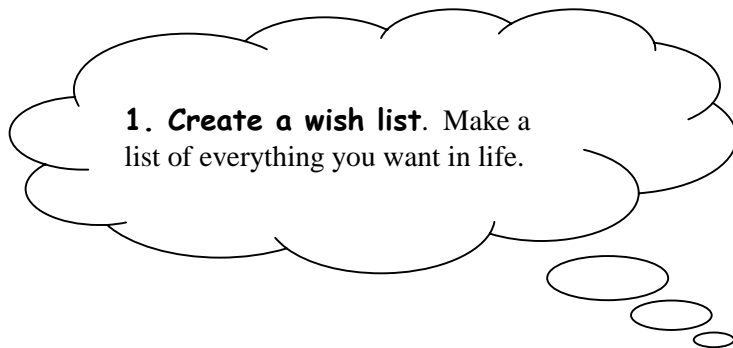


Strategies for exploring interests and setting goals

- *Encourage your child to recognize his or her values.* Discuss questions such as:
 - How do you spend your time?
 - How do you spend your money?
 - What do you get excited about?
 - What frustrates you?
 - Who do you want to be like? Why?
- *Let your child know that you want to hear about his or her dreams.* Respect his or her ideas and passions, and above all LISTEN. Resist the temptation to tell your child what to do, pass judgement, or focus on dreams you had when you were that age.
- *Challenge your teen to ask "What if?"* Discuss a fantasy situation, such as the following.
 - What would you do if you received a million dollar inheritance or award?
 - How would your dreams and goals change if you had this million dollars?
 - What is stopping you from going after your million dollar dreams today?
 You can gain insight into your child's dreams, goals and values by reading between the lines of his or her answers.

- *Encourage your child to read biographies.* Consider titles such as *Images of Greatness* by David Melton or *Kidstories: Biographies of 20 Young People You'd Like to Know* by Jim Delisle. These books give children an opportunity to learn how different people develop their gifts and talents.
- *Encourage your child to identify and record goals.* Use a worksheet such as **Activity: Goal-setting** (pp. 71–72), or work through the steps with your child.
- *Encourage your teen to develop a personal career portfolio.* There will be opportunities in Grades 7–9 Health and Life Skills and Senior High Career and Life Management (CALM) programs to begin this process.

Activity: Goal-setting



- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Focus

Circle the five most important things from your wish list, then choose one wish to focus on.

3. Refine

Turn your wish into a goal by identifying the first major step toward fulfilling that wish. For example:

- *My wish is to find a cure for cancer.*
- *My goal is to be accepted into the University of Alberta science program.*

Break this goal down into manageable steps or short-term goals. For example:

1. *I will score 90+ percent in all subject areas this year.*
2. _____
3. _____

4. The best goals are SMART:

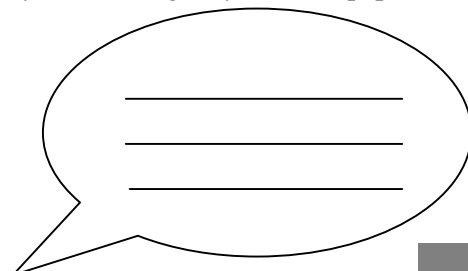
- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime-based.

My goal is to _____.

5. Use positive self-talk

If you have a goal that you don't think you can achieve, then you need to give yourself a pep talk. Some positive statements you could use include the following.

“I will achieve my chosen career.”
“I am reaching my goals.”
“I can do this!”



Activity: Goal-setting – continued

6. Make an action plan

For example:

Define your hurdles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I put off doing my math assignments.
Write down the steps you will take to get around the hurdles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will not open my e-mail until I have completed the day's math assignment.

Your action plan:

Define your hurdles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •
Write down the steps you will take to get around the hurdles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •

7. **Visualize** yourself achieving this goal and enjoying its rewards.



“If we did what we are capable of doing, we would astound ourselves.”

– Thomas Edison

Change is constant: cultivating adaptability

The career question of the future will not be “What *do* you do?” but “What *can* you do?” To build successful and fulfilling careers, teens need a new model of career development that emphasizes adaptable skills and attitudes, and the ability to deal with change. Being ready to handle constant change involves the following things:

Keeping options open

If children or teens become too attached too early to a specific long-term career goal, they take the chance that the occupation they have in mind may disappear or change radically before they “get there.” Encourage your child to set short-term goals that he or she can accomplish within a certain period of time while keeping longer-term options open.

Planning to be flexible and adaptive

A commonly-held work ethic is based on the notion that we must pick one thing and stick to it. However, most Canadians now change their occupations an average of four to six times in their lifetimes, and that number is likely to increase. Children and teens need to learn that security does not come from doing the same thing for a long time, but from being flexible enough to adapt to change.

Developing self-knowledge

Part of being adaptable means understanding your own skills and where they can take you. Individuals who are trying to make career choices often take tests to measure intelligence, interests, aptitudes, skills, values and suitability for particular occupations. However, these kinds of tests only measure the various aspects of a person or an occupation at a single moment in time. Young people need to realize that the best way to measure themselves is to *know* themselves.

Team up with others: the role of family, school and community

Parents have an important role in the career planning of their children. Even before children begin school, parents start them off on a career journey through activities such as vacations, visiting family members and developing interests in the community. It is no surprise then that a national survey shows that half of teens turn to their parents for help in making decisions about careers, school, money and right versus wrong.

However, the same survey reveals that 55 percent of teens surveyed feel they are misunderstood by their parents. This research suggests that children may want, need, and will probably accept parents’ help and advice, if it can be framed in a way that shows children that their parents do understand what matters to them. The following questions may help you to understand your child’s dreams, abilities and possible career options, as well as your own role in your child’s career planning. You may want to record answers in a journal and return to these questions a number of times throughout your child’s school years.

- What activities does my child enjoy most and what skills do these activities require?
- What careers would utilize these skills?
- Do I know anyone in that career whom I could ask to talk to my child?
- What careers have I often thought would be of interest to my child? Why? What skills are required for these careers that I see my child demonstrating?
- Does my child’s teacher have any suggestions for careers suited to my child’s skills and abilities?
- What are my hopes and dreams for my child?

Career planning is an ongoing and cooperative process. The aspirations that children develop from early experiences will grow and change as a result of activities, interactions and opportunities at school. A range of possible

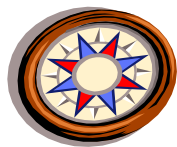
options may be imagined and discussed, from astronaut to veterinarian to sports star. Talk to your child's teachers and other school staff about your child's career goals, and opportunities that exist in the school and community.

Junior and senior high school are good times to begin exploring career options through activities such as work experience, volunteering and extra-curricular activities. Different work environments provide your teen with opportunities to develop new skills and find out more about possible career paths. These work experiences help teens to set new directions and take action. As part of the work force, your teen will also have more opportunity to learn about trends and projections for the future of certain careers.

To help you and your child record career-related interests, experiences and plans, see Alberta Learning's *Career Planner*. This folder helps students organize information about:

- education
- personal strengths and assets
- community volunteer involvement
- career planning activities, and
- career goals.

There are two versions of the *Career Planner*—one for junior high school and one for senior high school. Both planners can be downloaded at no cost from the Alberta Learning Web site at www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/other.asp.



Strategies for teaming with others

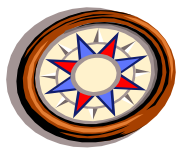
- *Help teachers learn about your child's career interests so they can consider this in planning for programming.* Encourage your child to discuss the *Career Planner* with his or her teachers.

- *Look for opportunities in the community.* Consider what work or volunteer opportunities could give your child some experience with careers of interest.
- *Investigate whether there is a job-shadowing or work experience program at your child's school.* Encourage your child to participate.
- *Find out how you and your child can be involved in career events.* Often schools or local post-secondary institutions organize annual events.
- *Encourage your child to maintain relationships with teachers or mentors.* These individuals could be potential references for scholarship or job applications.
- *Help your child to make a list of careers he or she might be interested in.* Learn as much as possible about these prospective careers through visits to work sites, interviews with people in the field, and visits to college and university classes.

Focus on the journey

Goal setting is an important part of career development, but children and teens need to understand that goals change and evolve. Career development is a lifelong process. Your child will need to review and update his or her goals and plans regularly, perhaps at the end of each school year. Your child's interests may change, he or she may develop or uncover new skills, eligibility requirements for post-secondary programs may change, or new senior high school courses may be offered. Every year, encourage your teen to reflect on his or her achievements and to define areas to maintain, to improve upon and to explore. Help your child to approach life as a journey, full of ongoing learning and exciting new opportunities.

Part of seeing life as a journey means recognizing that this journey involves much more than just a job. In the 21st century, we have broadened our understanding of career to include everything that an individual does over the course of a lifetime. In addition to paid employment, this can include hobbies, interests, leisure activities, part-time jobs, volunteer activities, sports and schooling. Children who are gifted have the opportunity to use their talents in a variety of fulfilling ways, not only through paid employment. For example, if your child is equally talented in writing, music and science, he or she may combine these abilities by becoming a scientist who also enjoys poetry and playing the piano, or a writer who specializes in scientific investigations but also reports on musical events, or a musician who writes about music theory and keeps abreast of scientific findings.



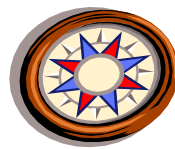
Strategies for focusing on the journey

- *Let your child know that career choice and development is a continuous process.* There will be many changes along the way.
- *Help your child to understand that talents can be expressed in a variety of ways.* A job is only one aspect of life—hobbies, volunteer work and social interactions may provide additional opportunities to use gifts and talents.
- *Encourage your teen to keep tabs on the future.* Follow the news on TV and read the business and career sections of the newspaper. Discuss trends and issues with your child.

Learning is ongoing: Planning for post-secondary studies

For many children who are gifted, post-secondary studies provides a forum to further explore and develop their potential. While post-secondary education provides specific training for careers, it also teaches how to focus effort and helps students develop the thinking skills needed to be successful in the work force and in life. As a result, post-secondary education gives individuals more job opportunities, higher incomes, better quality of life and increased mobility in the global market.

It is important that you and your child become familiar early on with the range of post-secondary options available. When your child is in junior high, begin exploring institutions and programs that your child may be interested in and investigating their admission requirements. To help you and your child select courses and plan a senior high school diploma that will create as many options as possible for post-secondary education, Alberta Learning has developed a resource called *A Credit to Yourself*. This resource that can be downloaded at no cost from www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/other.asp.



Strategies for planning for post-secondary studies

- *Discuss post-secondary options and programs with your child.* Consult with teachers and school counsellors.
- *Attend open houses of various post-secondary institutions.* Visit Web sites and send for information on programs that might fit your child's needs.

- *Keep track of information.* Use the **Activity: Charting Options for Post-secondary Education** worksheet (on p. 77) to record information as you and your teen investigate various options for post-secondary education.

Financing post-secondary education

In addition to whatever family savings you have available, there are many sources of funding for post-secondary education, including scholarships, grants and bursaries; federal, provincial and territorial loans; and bank loans. The key is to start investigating these sources of funding and planning a financial strategy as soon as possible. For more information about scholarships, grants, bursaries and loans, talk to your school guidance counsellor or visit the Alberta Learning Information Service Web site at www.alis.gov.ab.ca/learning/fa/main.asp.

Scholarships

The government, individual school boards, schools, post-secondary institutions, businesses and community organizations all offer scholarships. Most of these scholarships are awarded based on academic achievement, sometimes in combination with other factors such as community service. For example, in Alberta, students can earn a maximum of \$2,500 toward their post-secondary education through Alexander Rutherford Scholarships. These scholarships are awarded to students when they enroll in post-secondary institutions and have earned an 80% average in five senior high school courses (one of which must be a language arts course) at each grade level. Students typically apply for the Alexander Rutherford Scholarship in the spring of their Grade 12 year, and the award is paid during the first semester of post-secondary studies.

Grants and bursaries

In addition to scholarships, the provincial and federal governments give grants and bursaries such as the following:

- Maintenance Grants – for students with special circumstances.
- Canada Study Grants – for students with special needs.
- Canadian Millennium Bursary – up to \$3,000 per year for undergraduate students with high financial need.
- Alberta Opportunity Bursaries – for first or second year students.

Unlike loans, grants and bursaries do not need to be repaid upon graduation. Most grants and bursaries are awarded to students based on financial or other disadvantages.

Family contributions

When your child is in junior high school, begin talking to him or her about the need to plan and save for post-secondary education. As a family, discuss the contributions you will be able to make through a Registered Education Savings Plan or other sources, as well as your child's role and responsibility in saving for his or her education.

Your child may be able to contribute by making and saving money from a summer or part-time job. Help your teen to look for jobs that will expose him or her to different types of work or to a particular field of interest. Your teen may also be able to contribute money saved from allowances, birthdays, investments or other sources.

Government sponsored student loans

Your child may be eligible to receive student loans sponsored by the provincial and federal governments. These loans are available to full-time students with demonstrated financial need who are attending a certified post-secondary institution. Government loans are interest- and payment-free until the student leaves school.

Bank loans

Loans issued directly from a bank or other financial institution may be a suitable alternative if your child does not qualify for a government sponsored student loan.

Activity: Charting Options for Post-secondary Education

As you research different careers, keep track of post-secondary institutions and programs that would help you succeed in each career, as well as the entrance requirements for each program. Also, record any information about each career's potential for the future.

Type of Career	Type and Name of Institution	Entrance Requirements	Potential for the Future

