

Parent Guide: Introduction

Welcome to *Direct Your Future*[™], a career planning curriculum for middle school and high school students. You may not believe it, but you are probably the most important influence on the future career choices of your child. Research has consistently shown that parents or other caretakers exert the primary influence on a young person's thinking about the future. Therefore, it is important for you to be at your child's side, using this Parent Guide, as she or he begins to explore the future through this course. Each of the course's 11 modules is briefly summarized so that you will be aware of the content. Following each summary is a list of suggestions to help you explore the future with your child.

We ask students to think of their lives as a journey. The destinations of the past are already there, and they have the power to determine future destinations. Through a series of modules, students are challenged to focus on themselves and the world of work, and to learn how to map out a future career path. Activities are used within the modules to help students understand the process. Also included are handouts with additional information. In the end, the emerging roads become clearer.

It is important to understand that young adolescents are not ready to make final career choices. However, research has shown that their interests are fairly stable by this age. Students will take the Kuder Career Interests Assessment[®] and Kuder Skills Confidence Assessment[®] online, both of which provide results that list clusters of jobs in the order of your child's measured interests or skills. By relating interests to occupational choices, students can see what is required of them to prepare for entry into occupations being considered. For example, if students are interested in the Health Science cluster, they know that they must master challenging science and math courses in high school.

This curriculum is intended to help students and their parents make informed choices about the courses taken in high school. Of course, the level of coursework in high school depends on previous knowledge and performance. Therefore, a side benefit of career planning at this age is to open the eyes of students to the connection between current academic achievement and future education and career choices.

Characteristically, many young adolescents have unrealistic goals. Many want to become professional athletes or rock stars. A small percentage of young people do reach the top in these fields, so dreams should not be discouraged. However, in both of these areas, fame is short-lived. Therefore, parents can play an important role in encouraging aspirations while helping their child make realistic choices.

One final word of caution: your child is not you. Much time, money, and effort is lost when a young person pursues a career only to satisfy parents. That does not mean that your child may not want to follow in your footsteps, but for now it is important that you listen with an open mind and heart. Enjoy this journey together as your child answers the questions: Who am I? Where am I going? How will I get there?

Parent Guide: Module 1

Scanning the World of Possibilities

In this module, students will learn why it is important for them to start thinking about their futures. They begin by thinking back to the time when they were first asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” At that early stage, most children relate to an occupation with which they are familiar, such as firefighter, nurse, teacher, etc. As they grow older and their universe of knowledge about the world of work expands, their answers become more defined. To help them think about what occupations are like, they participate in an activity called “The Dictator Game.” Each student is randomly assigned an occupation which they must then describe to a classmate in terms of what it would be like to be in that job for a day. At the end of the activity, they are asked whether they liked or disliked the job they were assigned. If they liked the job, they are asked to think about what appealed to them. If they disliked the job, they are asked what turned them off to that kind of work. These are real occupations in which thousands of adults participate every day.

What appeals to one person may not appeal to another because we are all different. We have different interests, abilities, and work values. Although it may be too early for middle school students to choose an occupation, it is not too early to begin the exploration process. Interests are fairly well-established by this time. Values are beginning to be formed, and skill development can be planned through the choice of education. Although high school students may not be ready to make a final occupational choice, it’s not too soon to make informed choices as interests are set and values are in the formation stage.

Students are also asked to consider who or what influences their career decision making. It should be noted that parents are the number one influence on their children when it comes to thinking about future work. However, others may also influence their choices – a favorite teacher, neighbor, or relative, for example. There are also many other factors that play a part, such as TV, the Internet, or coursework. Sometimes an experience will trigger a desire to do a certain kind of work. For example, a child who has been through physical therapy may decide that is the occupation to pursue.

At the end of the module, students will be given an outline of the rest of the course. The emphasis of the curriculum is on exploration – of themselves and the world of work.

Homework Assignment

Middle school students are asked to record five decisions that they have recently made and summarize the alternatives, information considered, and the results of each decision.

High school students are asked to interview a grandparent or other adult over 60 about how work used to be and to record the information on a worksheet.

Additional Support

How Can You Support Your Child in Exploring the Future?

- Ask to see the course description. Go over it with your child and talk about the elements that go into career planning.
- Ask your child what occupation she or he was assigned in Activity 1: The Dictator Game. Was it liked or disliked? Why?
- Do not pressure your child to make a decision about the future. They will change, as will the world of work. Now is the time for exploration.
- Encourage your child to see this as an opportunity to learn about making informed career decisions.

Parent Guide: Module 2

Mapping the Future

This module is designed to make high school students aware of the changes that have taken place in the workplace in the past 20-30 years. In preparation for this lesson, students were asked to interview a grandparent or other older adult about how work was for them – including what they wore, what the work environment was like, the equipment they used, the loyalty they had, and the length of time they stayed with an employer. In the class session, students are asked to share what they learned through this experience.

In addition, either through articles that the instructor brings or through a class assignment to use specific websites, students are asked to identify several major changes that have taken place or are taking place in the 21st century workplace. These changes include being able to work from home, the need for continual upgrading of skills, changing jobs more often, being part of a virtual or perhaps global team, and having fewer employer benefits.

Based on what students learn about changes in the workplace, they are asked to infer what those changes may mean for their personal career planning. These implications include needing some form of postsecondary education, lifelong learning, possible periods of unemployment, and the need to assume personal responsibility for financial planning and ongoing skill development.

Homework Assignment

Students are asked to complete a worksheet on which they list decisions they have made in the past week, the process they used to make them, the information they may have gathered before reaching them, and the outcomes of their choices. This material is used in class discussion about the process of decision making in the next session.

Additional Support

How Can You Assist Your Child to Understand the 21st Century Workplace?

In your work or that of your friends and family, you are probably observing many of the rapid changes in the 21st century workplace, including layoffs, reduction in employer benefits, the need for new skills, lessened employer and employee loyalty, and the need for frequent job change. Share these with your child, and point out ways in which he or she can be prepared to deal with the shifts.

Parent Guide: Module 3

Determining Your Direction

This module is designed to help students understand that decisions can be made by applying a process, and that learning that process is critical to making all important decisions in life, including those about career choices. Each of us makes many choices every day: what to eat, what to wear, which TV programs to watch, whether to go to different places. Each of these seemingly small choices is part of a chain of choices, and each has outcomes, either positive or negative. In discussing their homework, students come to understand that the possible outcomes of some decisions are more critical than others. The more important the outcome is, the more necessary it becomes to use a planful model of decision making. The steps in a planful model are as follows:

- **Step 1: Identify the decision to be made**, that is, the reason for a decision and what it is that you want to achieve either through solving a problem or reaching some future goal.
- **Step 2: Consider characteristics about yourself** that need to be woven into the decision-making process.
- **Step 3: Identify alternatives** for solving the problem or reaching the goal.
- **Step 4: Collect information about each alternative** in order to be as fully informed as possible.
- **Step 5: Put alternatives in priority order** based on the information gained.
- **Step 6: Take action** on the steps needed to put the highest priority alternative into effect.
- **Step 7: Review the decision and possible outcomes** to determine whether they have met your needs.

Students read a story about someone their age who has to make an important decision. Using the planful process, the student makes the decision. By learning this process, students will be able to make better decisions now and throughout their lives.

Homework Assignment

Students are asked to write a short description of themselves from three different perspectives: how they think they are seen by their parents, friends, and teachers. They are also asked to interview an adult about the different life roles that he or she plays.

Additional Support

How Can You Support Your Child in Making Good Decisions?

- Help your child think of an important future decision that may affect her or him. Use the planful decision-making process with your child in thinking about this decision.
- With your child, list some important life decisions that will need to be made: choosing high school courses, what to do after high school, whether to marry and have a family, and which occupation to choose.

Parent Guide: Module 4

Embarking on a Voyage of Self-Discovery

This module is designed to assist students in understanding what a self-concept is, and how it relates to initially choosing an occupation and making career changes later. In thinking about themselves, students will consider the many roles they play and how these roles combine in careers. Students are asked to look at themselves carefully. It is important to get a good, clear picture because experts who have studied career choice and career planning tell us that we are most likely to be satisfied in our jobs if we have been able to clearly identify our interests, skills, and work values and find occupations where these fit. Dr. Donald Super, a leading theorist, says that we seek to work out our view of ourselves through our work. Self-concept is the image we have of ourselves, including the way we look, how we think other people see us, what our strengths and weaknesses are, what our interests and abilities are, and how our parents accept us. We form our self-concept from the feedback other people give us and our own judgment about ourselves.

Young adolescents often have negative self-concepts. As their minds and bodies are going through rapid changes, they often become confused, believing that no one has ever looked or felt as they do. The usually sociable daughter becomes moody, wallowing in misery. The usually outgoing son no longer shares confidences. They believe that everyone is looking at them, waiting for them to make a mistake. Self-concepts will change with age, experience, and reinforcement; but at this point, it is critical that parents help their children to see their positive characteristics.

Students are also introduced to the concept of life roles. Our self-concept includes how we see our strengths and weaknesses in different roles in life: son/daughter, student, friend, worker, spouse/partner, parent, homemaker, leisurite, and citizen. The kind of work one chooses is affected by and will affect all of these roles. As an adult, you know that the time and energy devoted to each of these roles is a constant balancing act, and that work strongly affects the other roles. This is another consideration in career choice.

Homework Assignment

Students are asked to group 32 occupations into 16 pairs, based on some similarity between the two occupations in each pair. They are also asked to complete [Activity 12: Setting the Clock](#), in which they identify key events that they want to happen within specific time frames during their life.

Additional Support

How Can You Help Your Child Develop a Positive Self-Concept?

- Write a letter to your child stating the good things you see in her or him and your hopes for the future. Be realistic, but be as positive as possible.
- Share some memories of your adolescence. Ask your child what some of the things are that she or he worries about or fears. (As adults, we know that most of our adolescent worries are outgrown. However, at this point, it is important to just listen.)
- Talk to your child about your life roles and how your work impacts each of them.

Parent Guide: Module 5

Exploring the Destinations

This module is designed to teach students about clusters, or groupings, of occupations. The classification system used supports logical exploration by looking at the occupations related to major themes or industries. The same classification system can be used to organize high school curriculum so that students can make a four-year high school plan related to their tentative occupational choices. Instead of trying to learn about hundreds of occupations in a random fashion, students can begin their exploration with occupations in the clusters of highest interest.

Homework Assignment

Students will take the Kuder Career Interests Assessment and the Kuder Skills Confidence Assessment online in Kuder Navigator®, a web-based career planning system for students in grades six through 12. They have been given a handout with instructions.

Additional Support

How Can You Help Your Child Understand the Organization of Work?

- Talk with your child about which clusters seem interesting at this point. Your child will be taking the Kuder Career Interests Assessment that will rank her or his interests according to the occupational clusters.
- Try to place your work, or the work of neighbors or relatives, into one of the clusters.

Parent Guide: Module 6

Finding Your Personal Compass Points

When students come to this session, they will have taken the Kuder Career Interests Assessment and the Kuder Skills Confidence Assessment online. These assessments report a student's interests and skills related to the occupational clusters in rank order. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions in these assessments. The purpose is to find out what your child's interests and skills are and relate them to groups of occupations to explore. These assessments will help identify occupations to consider, courses to take throughout high school, and majors to pursue in schools after high school. The primary purpose of the online assessments is to guide the exploration of occupations in order to identify possible options for future work.

Individual students can pay particular attention to those occupations related to the clusters of their highest interest. Interests are beginning to stabilize by the middle school years, and become quite stable in high school, so there is still time to develop the needed skills to support those interests. Good career planning involves identifying one's interests and then developing the skills that are required to do well in these preferred activities.

Your child can print out the results of the Kuder Career Interests Assessment and the Kuder Skills Confidence Assessment. If you have access to the Internet, you can also view these results in your son or daughter's portfolio. To do so, visit <http://navigator.kuder.com> or the other custom URL, if provided. Sign in, free of charge, indicating that you are a parent. In order to see the portfolio, you will need your child's unique username, which only he or she can give you, and the date of birth. The reports will suggest a list of occupations to explore. The results are listed in rank order by career pathways or clusters.

The Kuder Career Interests Assessment rank orders the clusters of occupations. Your child will be exploring occupations in the clusters listed under the high interest category. The interests assessment includes a unique section, called Person Match (found in a tab at the top of the top of interests assessment results page), which provides occupational bios written by real people who have an interest profile similar to your child's and have indicated satisfaction in their work. The third part of the report lists suggested occupations for your child's exploration. These results allow your child to focus on specific parts of the work world rather than explore the totality. The best way to use these results is to guide exploration. Instead of trying to learn about hundreds of occupations in a random fashion, students can begin their exploration with occupations in the clusters of highest interest.

Homework Assignment

Students are asked to show the Kuder Career Interests Assessment and the Kuder Skills Confidence Assessment reports to their parents and other significant adults to get their reactions. Students will then list occupations that they have thought about, those that appealed to them from the list provided by the assessments, and those that adults have suggested to them.

Middle school students, in addition to the first assignment, are given a worksheet for completion that details their “dream job.”

High school students, in addition to the first assignment, are asked to take a third online assessment called Super’s Work Values Inventory-revised. This assessment identifies important work values.

Additional Support

How Can You Help Your Child Use the Assessment Reports?

- Ask to see the report of your child’s interests and skills. Ask whether she or he agrees with the results. Why or why not?
- What are your reactions to the reports? Do you believe that they accurately describe your child’s interests and current skill level?
- What activities or schoolwork does your child enjoy that confirms the results, such as helping with repair projects around home or getting good grades in math and science?

Parent Guide: Module 7

Using Guideposts to Direct Your Journey

This module is designed to help students understand that jobs, like people, have certain characteristics that influence the satisfaction level of the worker. Middle school students are reminded of the job assigned to them in [Activity 1: The Dictator Game](#). When they thought about what they liked or disliked about the job, they were probably naming job characteristics, such as that they wouldn't want to sit at a desk all day, or that they liked to work with machines. They are then asked to look at the dream job they created for homework. What characteristics appealed to them? The kind of work one chooses will influence lifestyle: where you live, what you wear, and what kind of transportation you use. Therefore, it is important to consider not only interests, but also the job characteristics of occupations.

In this module, middle school students are also asked to think about traditional male and female jobs. Traditional male/female jobs are those in which 75 percent or more of those employed in a field represent one gender. Although this may not be the inhibitor to career choice that it once was, it is still important to bring to the attention of middle school students that gender should not be a factor in career choice. This is especially important for girls because the traditional female jobs, such as secretary, teacher, librarian, have also been the lowest paying for the amount of education or training needed. Of course, these occupations should be options for both males and females but should not be selected because "that is what girls or boys do." Students are also introduced to resources for finding out more about occupations.

Students have identified occupational clusters of highest interest and have considered the general skills they must develop to be successful in these. However, a third factor that relates to good career choice is work values. Work values are demonstrated in our goals, interests, feelings, attitudes, and behavior. Values give meaning to our lives and are often the deciding factor in what we will or will not do. Each of us has developed a unique system of values that determines how we feel about our work. If we pursue an occupation that is congruent with our work values, we will most likely be satisfied with the work.

Middle school students are just beginning to develop values that may be deciding factors in career choice at a later point. For example, most middle school students would probably choose monetary rewards over helping others as motivation for a career choice. However, as they mature, they may realize that helping others is important to them. At this stage, we deal only with job characteristics that relate to personal preference, such as working indoors or outdoors, working alone or with others. For now, middle school students need to know that there are characteristics inherent in jobs that fulfill our

desire to lead a satisfying life and that these job satisfiers should be considered in career decision-making.

High school students, on the other hand, are in the process of developing these work values. The importance of these values is assessed in the high school component of this lesson by the results of Super's Work Values Inventory-revised, taken as a homework assignment. Based on the results of this assessment, occupations are suggested exploration. Further, occupations are identified that match an individual's interests, skills, and work values.

Homework Assignment

Students are asked to speak with you or another adult about the characteristics of your work, or about how values affect or sometimes conflict with work.

Additional Support

How Can You Help Your Child to Think About Job Satisfiers?

- Talk with your child about the job characteristics (or work values, if your child is in high school) that she or he thinks are important in work. Don't be critical of their choices. They are just developing. Share what is important to you in your work.
- If your child is in high school, ask to see the results of the Super's Work Values Inventory-revised, if taken.

Parent Guide: Module 8

Refining the Destinations

In this module, students choose three occupations that they wish to explore in depth. Collecting information about alternatives is an essential step in the career planning process. If Internet access is available, they will use Navigator to obtain most of the information. If computers are not available, print resources will be used. It is important for students to learn about the resources that are available so that they may continue to research occupations in the future.

In their research, students are asked to:

1. List duties or tasks involved in the occupation.
2. Describe the work setting and working conditions.
3. Describe the preparation required for entry into this occupation.
4. Note the typical salary range for this occupation (from beginning level to experienced level) nationally and in their state of residence.
5. Explain whether or not they would be interested in pursuing an occupation, and why or why not this is the case.

High school students are able to see additional information in occupation overviews, and so are further asked to:

6. Write down the expected employment outlook both in their state and nationally.
7. List values that may be attained.
8. List skills and/or abilities required for this occupation.
9. List any special requirements for entry into this occupation, such as licenses or certifications.
10. List benefits that are usually offered in addition to salary.
11. List kinds of advancement that may be possible.
12. Write the title of one related occupation (in the same cluster with similar job duties).

Homework Assignment

Students are asked to interview a person working in the occupation of their first choice. An activity sheet, titled [Activity 20: Information Interview](#), includes an interview guide.

Additional Support

How Can You Help Your Child Learn More About Occupations?

- Experience is the best teacher. The more your child learns about the world of work, the better prepared she or he will be to make informed decisions. Make it a habit to talk with your child about work and to point out various occupations when you travel together. Ask about the researched occupations and what your child now thinks.

Parent Guide: Module 9

Charting Your Course

This module is designed to help students make a connection between interests and education planning. More specifically, it focuses on the selection of high school courses and on the type and level of postsecondary education available. Your child has researched three occupations in depth. In this lesson, the various pathways to get the required education or training are discussed.

We often think of four-year college as the goal for all students after completion of high school. In fact, there are many ways to get education or training. These paths of training have very different costs and provide very different experiences. This lesson is intended to help you and your child think about the future so that you will be prepared. In that regard, the U.S. Department of Labor indicates that in the early 21st century, approximately 15 percent of jobs can be entered with high school graduation only, 65 percent with education or training up to two years beyond high school, and 20 percent with a four-year college degree or more.

The various education/training pathways introduced in this module are the following:

- **Apprenticeship:** a combination of classroom instruction and work experience, usually paid for by the union representing the trade. For more information, contact your state apprenticeship office. The addresses and phone numbers can be found at www.doleta.gov/jobseekers/apprent.cfm.
- **Vocational-technical schools:** : private commercial schools that provide training for specific occupations. For accredited schools, go to www.accsc.org.
- **Two-year and community colleges:** private two-year colleges that award an associate degree upon completion. Most two-year colleges are publicly supported community colleges. They offer transfer programs and career-related programs.
- **Four-year colleges:** private four-year colleges that award varying degrees. The more than 2,000 four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. can be broken into three subgroups: liberal arts colleges, universities, and technical institutes.
 - Liberal Arts Colleges are institutions in which students have a broad exposure to the humanities (art, literature, music, history, foreign languages, etc.) as well as sciences. Baccalaureate and perhaps master's degrees may be earned.
 - Universities include many schools or colleges, each specializing in an occupationally related area, such as the College of Education, the College of Engineering, etc.

- Technical Institutes specialize in specific technical fields, such as engineering, computer science, or mathematics.
- **Military service:** another avenue to postsecondary education and training. Its various branches offer training for approximately 150 military occupations for which there are civilian counterparts.

Students are also introduced to the process of making a four-year plan for high school, or are able to update their existing four-year plan in Navigator.

Homework Assignment

Students are asked to take [Activity 21: Creating a Roadmap](#) home and discuss it with their parents to see how you react to their choice of occupations, tentative high school plan, and thoughts for education after high school. Students are also asked to complete an education plan online or on a template printed from Navigator.

Additional Support

How Can You Help Your Child Plan Her/His Future?

- Go over the activity sheet titled [Activity 21: Creating a Roadmap](#) with your child. Talk about the future and your thoughts for education after high school. Also go over the education plan that your child has completed. This plan may be sent to you electronically or in print form.

Parent Guide: Module 10

Writing Your Personal Logbook

In this module, students learn about their portfolio that they can access and maintain in Navigator for as long as they wish. The portfolio is built as students use Navigator. When they first signed on to Navigator, students provided some demographic information, such as address, date of birth, and email address.

That information, the results of the assessments, occupations selected as favorites, and education plans are placed into their portfolio, which is protected by their unique username and password. High school students have access to additional information including saved scholarships and grants, saved postsecondary majors, and the capability to build an e-Profile that can be shared with potential employers or others at the student's discretion.

The purpose of the portfolio is to provide a place where students can organize information about themselves that will later be useful in selecting high school courses, planning career exploration, applying to postsecondary education, or applying for a job. Information can be entered into the portfolio or edited at any time from any place where the student has access to the Internet. The portfolio will remain in a secure place for as long as students access it at least once a year. In middle school, the portfolio contains the student's demographic information, assessment results, favorite clusters and occupations, favorite schools, and high school education plans. In high school, other sections are added, such as favorite postsecondary majors, favorite scholarships, and uploaded materials that document work readiness or experience. These documents can also be uploaded to an e-Profile that high school students can make accessible to employers or school personnel.

Homework Assignment

Students are asked to discuss their future career plans with you. They are also encouraged to show their portfolio to you and ask:

- Do you think that the results of the assessments “fit” me?
- What information do you suggest that I add to my portfolio?
- What is your reaction to my preliminary education and occupation choices?

Additional Support

How Can You Help Your Child Maintain a Portfolio?

- Students will add information to their portfolios in this class session, and it is really important that they keep the portfolio updated at least once each semester. Doing so will ensure that there is an accurate and ongoing record of information that is important for academic and career planning. So, one thing you can do is to encourage your son or daughter to revisit Navigator, using the unique username and password that was created at first use, and to add or edit information as appropriate.
- Ask your son or daughter to share their portfolio with you. As you look at it together, its review will give you an opportunity to discuss the results of the assessments and their possible implications for selecting courses, future education, and occupations.

Parent Guide: Module 11

Planning for Getting a Job

In this module, high school students learn some basics about how to prepare for a job search and how to find job openings. The lesson starts with an activity designed to assist students to think about the characteristics they want in a job – the type of organization they want to work for, annual salary range, career ladder, opportunities for advancement, travel requirements, etc.

Following that, the lesson plan includes learning how to find job openings, completing a job application, and preparing a resume using the resume builder in Navigator. Students are given information about what to include in their resume, the different types of resumes used, and tips for making a resume presentable and attractive to employers.

Students store the sample job application and resume in their portfolio so that they can be edited in the future and even sent to a prospective employer. They are encouraged to create the resume using multiple acceptable formats and structures, and to print off and save these copies for their records.

Homework Assignment

By this time in the course, students have narrowed down their choice of occupations to three. The assignment for this last class session is to use the methods taught in this lesson to search for job openings in those three occupations. The purpose of this assignment is to provide an opportunity for the students to use the job search methods taught as well as to learn more about the occupations they are considering.

Additional Support

How Can You Help Your Child Learn More About Job Seeking?

- Share the experience you have had in finding suitable job openings and applying and interviewing for them. If you have a resume, show it to your child as one example of how a resume can look.