

Family Tapestries Strengthening Family Bonds



Fact Sheet

Adolescent Employment

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Adolescence is a period of transitioning from the carefree world of childhood into the adult world of responsibility. During this time, major developmental tasks include identity development, striving for autonomy, and striving for achievement. Also, adolescents are striving for increased social, emotional, and financial independence from their parents. Looking for employment during this developmental stage is a way to accomplish all of these goals.

The work history of most young people begins early in life with more than 50% of teens beginning their first jobs around the age of 12. Boys tend to begin their jobs at younger ages and work more hours than girls. As teenagers reach high school, nearly half are entering the labor market and working during the school year. By the time teens graduate from high school, 80% will have held a part-time job at some time during the high school year.

The Effects of Work on Teens

Research shows that working during high school may have both positive and negative effects. The benefits for teens include the opportunity to:

- Obtain valuable work experiences
- Learn time management skills
- Form good work habits
- Learn how to effectively manage finances
- Gain useful, marketable skills
- Become financially independent

However the negative consequences of teen employment may outweigh the positive benefits. These include:

- **Less time on homework.** Working students may not have or make the time to complete their work.
- **More classroom deviant activity and less academic effort.** Working students may cheat, copy assignments, or cut classes to compensate for time spent on the job rather than school assignments.
- **Higher rates of absenteeism and less school involvement.** Employment may place constraints on the student's study and sleep time. Fatigue or lack of preparation for the day's academic activities may discourage the working teen from going to school and a job may take the place of extracurricular activities.
- **Lower grades in school.** Students who work more than 20 hours a week have grade point averages that are lower than other students who work 10 or less hours a week.
- **Less time with family.** Employment has an impact on relationships within the family because it reduces the amount of time spent with parents and siblings.
- **More conflict with parents over spending decisions.** Disagreements arise between parents and their children over the use of their money. Expectations of how teens are to use their money include paying for regular expenses, educational expenses, and a small percentage of teens are expected to contribute to family expenses. This is an added source of conflict because teens may feel that they are putting forth the effort to work to finance their expenses, and may feel forced to help pay for household expenses.

- **More likely to use drugs and alcohol.** Substance abuse is higher for workers than for non-workers and for students who work longer hours (20 or more).
- **Development of negative views of work itself.** Early entry into a negative or harsh work environment may encourage negative views of work.

Overall, the negative effects of employment are linked to how often and how long, not whether, a student works. The more hours teens work, the more prone they are to experience these negative effects. The average high school student works 20 hours per week, and about 10% work full time (35 hours or more). Other factors that affect how students handle employment and school life include the intensity and difficulty of the work done.

Why Teens Work

The data shows that by the time teens reach the tenth grade, more than half of them report saving their earnings as a way to achieve a higher standard of living. In other words, their involvement in work is motivated by the desire to buy things. Typically, teens spend their money on car expenses, clothing, educational expenses, saving for college, and helping their families with living expenses (e.g., rent, groceries).

How to Help Working Teens

There are several things that you as a parent can do for your teen to help ease the stress associated with juggling school, work, and family life.

- Discuss with your teen his or her reasons for wanting a job and explain the responsibilities associated with having a job while in high school.
- Come to a consensus about how you expect your teen to use his or her income. Will they be helping out with family finances? Would you like them to begin saving for college? Reaching a consensus will help to avoid later conflicts about money.
- Create a daily or weekly schedule with your teen that highlights the time that they spend working and the time they spend on homework and other school-related activities. Remember that work may be beneficial if the number of hours worked per week is 15 or less.
- Set up family time periodically. This could be once a week or month and is a time where you and your teen get reacquainted through quality interactions such as conversations, game playing, or family outings.
- Teach your teen practical ways to manage adverse situations on their jobs as well as in school.
- Teach your teen effective ways to manage the many demands that are made on their time. As they move closer to adulthood it will be necessary to manage many demanding roles as their responsibilities increase. This is a good time to learn how to use their time and resources wisely.
- Most importantly, be supportive.

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