

How to talk to your teenagers or young adults about careers...



...even when they won't listen to you!

I remember being a young adult - I thought I had all the answers and wanted to show that I could 'adult' by making my own decisions and not needing advice from anyone! Especially my parents...

It's common for young adults to think like this, and as a mother of 2 young adults I saw the same behaviours from them as I had demonstrated at the same age!



These young adults are wanting to move into adulthood and take charge of their lives, but they don't know what they don't know.

Exploring career options with your young adults can be a minefield of contentious comments, shutdowns and ignoring your advice under the heading of **"You don't know what it's like for us!"**

The world of work has changed and the science of how we select our careers has changed - I am constantly teaching parents about the knowledge we have NOW about careers and how it differed from the thinking we used when we were leaving school.

So how do you navigate these differences and the independent thinking style that young adults want to adopt?

Here's my **TOP 10 TIPS**

**for how to discuss career options with them,
while keeping your relationship intact.**

1. You do NOT have to solve the “*What am I going to do after high school?*” question your young adult has!

Just focus on being available to START a discussion (which might take place over a few years!) and be available as a sounding board (a safe place to share their thoughts or concerns). Often, I said to my children when they were exploring career options, “*Well we don’t have to decide now, let’s just keep talking about it and see where it goes.*”



2. Notice what THEY take notice of.

Here's an example – my family loves movies; we love discussing what we thought of every aspect of a movie! Through this shared passion, I have noticed that one of my children loves the technical aspects – whether a movie logically makes sense (did the car explosion look realistic, could that person have really driven the car over that ramp, etc), while my other child looks at the story and how they conveyed key themes and addressed social issues. I love looking at the human behaviour (not surprisingly!) and how the relationships were portrayed and reading between the lines etc. It enabled me to mention to each child what they noticed and how it was something that set them apart from the rest of us – it hints at what they are INTERESTED in. These interests can suggest careers, so you can help them in getting to know themselves by highlighting that you have noticed what THEY take notice of. If someone had mentioned to me, when I was a young adult, that I was fascinated with observing and analysing human behaviour, then I wouldn't have taken such a long route to my present career, but at that time I thought EVERYONE thought that way!



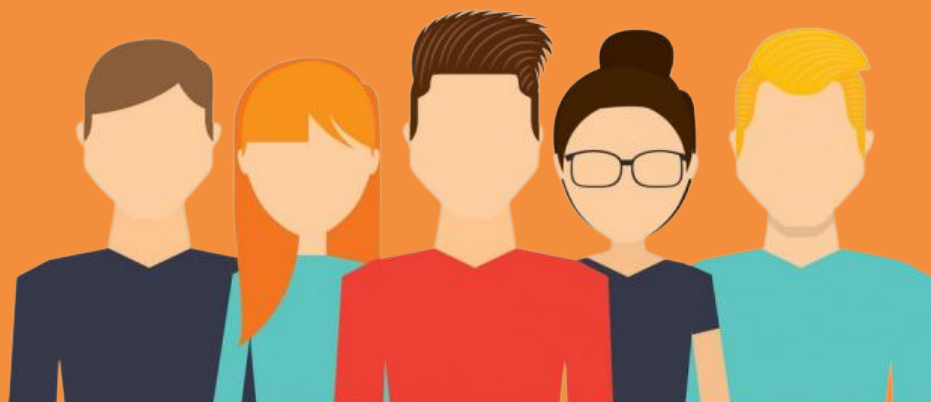
3. Avoid judgement or shutting down options.

Hard to do, I know! Your young adult might come up with a career option that doesn't seem feasible (*"I saw a guy on YouTube making \$100K per month and I reckon I could do that!"*), but don't dismiss it as unrealistic or stupid. It's NOT your job to approve or disapprove a career choice! Just listen and ask questions: *"I don't know much about a career as a YouTuber – what appeals to you about that?"* and *"Well if it interests you, keep exploring it in detail and seeing if it's feasible; I'm happy to help you sift through the pros and cons."* If the career appeal is just the pay, then eventually they will realise that it's the only thing about the job that they like, and eventually will drop it. In the meantime, you've kept the lines of communication open.

4. Be ready to acknowledge that you don't have the answers.

Try using this line: *"The world of work has changed and I'm not highly knowledgeable about this, but I know it's an important decision so I'm keen to learn more and help you."* Just letting your young adult know that they are not alone in making their career decision, is HUGE. Many young adults tell me how they feel so much pressure to make a good career decision and feel alone in finding the best solution, so remind them that you are there to partner with them and learn as they learn.





5. Recognise your bias in exploring career options.

It would be easier for us as parents if our children picked a career that was similar to ours, then it's easier for us to understand.

Here's an example – when my oldest son was exploring career options in Year 12, he talked about his interest in computers. My immediate reaction (and one I'm not proud of) was to say, *“Well all your generation are into computers, aren't they?”* On further exploration and completion of my career search questionnaire, it was clear that my son was extremely interested in ALL aspects of computing – software, hard, engineering, design. So, I gave myself a shake and reminded myself that this was HIS interest – just because it's not mine, doesn't make it invalid! Right then and there, I started learning about computer science careers, looking for opportunities to learn more about them and having conversations with him about how to get where he wanted – this change in my approach enabled him to share ideas openly and without my bias or ignorance getting in the way.

6. Ask them how you can help them.

Again, don't expect to have all the answers, just make yourself available to help. Ask *"Who do you think could help you with this information about engineering careers?"* and *"What if we just started by going to the Uni Open Day together and seeing what we can find out?"* or *"I might know someone in that career, would speaking to them be helpful for you?"* Avoid the *"You SHOULD..."* or *"What you NEED to do is..."*

Make suggestions rather than telling them or issuing orders.

7. Pick your battles.

Your child might be focused on going to Otago University because all their mates are going and they plan to flat together, but without any consideration of the study or career path that will suit them. This often happens and you can get all anxious about this, or you can let the idea burn out slowly in its own time, as your young adult realises that flatting is just one small aspect of going to Otago, and usually they come to the conclusion that there might not be a study path for them there. Don't respond to EVERY idea or thought they have, sometimes they are just a fleeting notion!

8. Remember that ignoring you is a form of power for your young adult.

To handle this, pick your times to have in-depth conversations about issues such as career options – don't force the discussion when they clearly aren't in the mood. If my children were energised or chatty in the car after school, I sometimes seized the opportunity to have more in-depth discussions about career options, when they didn't have to look me in the eye and couldn't get out of the car! Sometimes, when they had mates in the car, a light-hearted chat about study options provided a chance to put some ideas into the 'universe'!



9. Praise effort BEFORE achievements.

It's easy for some students to get great results, but the behaviour that should be most encouraged and is valued in the workplace, is effort. Take note of the EFFORT going into their studies, activities, etc and commend them for this – let them know you see their effort and value them for it. This is what sets them up for success in the workplace and helps them put school performance into perspective.

10. Avoid shaming them, bribing or giving them ultimatums.

These are strategies that invite your young adult to defy them. Telling them *“What a silly idea, you’d have to be a loser to consider that as a viable career!”* or *“You can do anything you want, but I forbid you to do THAT!”* is not constructive or likely to support you in building a positive relationship with them. Hold your views to yourself and if you can't say anything positive, say, *“That’s an interesting idea, tell me more...”* Some parents have said to me, *“I told my young adult that if they picked a career in X or Y then I would pay for their study fees.”* This is a recipe for disaster/failure and an easy way out for parents.



The more I learn about the science of career exploration and the challenges parents face in supporting their young adults through this process, the more it reinforces how challenging it is to make the right decision! **That's where I help out** - my mission is to show young adults (aged 16-25) across New Zealand how to find a career and study path that aligns with their interests and gives them a sense of purpose. And when they find this, their mental health benefits and the sense of relief for their parents is huge!

If you want professional, objective, fact-based and non-emotional support in helping your young adult identify their best-fit career path, I'd love to chat!

You can book a free discovery call, with no-sales-chat, at a day and time that suits you! I can answer your questions and you can see if I'm the right person to help you (if I'm not, that's OK - my service isn't for everyone). Talking about careers and the challenges our young adults face is a passion for me, and I want to share that knowledge.


**CLICK BOOK
YOUR CALL**

Thanks for downloading this tip sheet, and I look forward to sharing more information and insights in my weekly TGIF (Truth, Growth, Information, Fun) newsletter, which is sent out each Friday evening.

**Best,
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