

Parent Guide: Helping your youth find a career pathway

Helping your teen or university leaver find direction without adding stress, confusion or pressure. Many young people feel unsure about what they want to do after school or even uni. That's normal. Your role isn't to have all the answers—it's to create an environment where your teen feels supported while they explore their options.

1. Understand what's really going on

When a teen says:

“I don't know what I want to do”

It often really means:

- “I don't want to get it wrong”
- “I don't know what options actually exist”
- “Nothing feels like it fits me yet”
- “I haven't had enough real exposure to careers”

👉 Lack of direction is usually **lack of exploration, not lack of ability**

2. What NOT to say (even when it's well-intentioned)

These phrases can increase pressure:

- “You need to decide soon”
- “What are you going to do with your life?”
- “You just need to pick something practical”
- “Your cousin already knows what they're doing”

Even if motivating, they often create:

- Anxiety
- Avoidance
- Shutdown conversations

3. What actually helps instead

Try replacing pressure with curiosity:

- ✓ “What subjects do you enjoy most right now?”
- ✓ “What kind of work sounds interesting to you?”
- ✓ “Do you prefer working with people, ideas, or hands-on tasks?”
- ✓ “What would a good day at work look like for you?”

👉 The goal is not answers — it’s reflection.

4. Help them explore, not decide

Most teens are asked to “choose a career” before they’ve had real exposure.

Instead, support exploration:

- Work experience opportunities
- Volunteering
- Career talks or mentoring
- Online research into industries
- Talking to people doing real jobs

👉 Exposure builds clarity faster than pressure ever will.

5. Understand the real pathways (it's not just university)

Many parents grew up with a “uni = success” mindset, but today’s pathways are more flexible:

- University degrees
- Trades and apprenticeships
- Online and remote careers
- Entrepreneurship
- Hybrid pathways (work + study)

👉 There is no single “right” route anymore — just the right fit for your teen.

❤️ **6. Your role as a parent**

Your teen doesn’t need you to have all the answers.

They need you to:

- Stay calm when they feel unsure
- Ask thoughtful questions instead of giving solutions
- Support exploration, not force decisions
- Encourage progress, not perfection

⚠️ **7. Signs your teen may need extra support**

Consider outside help if they:

- Avoid all career or future conversations
- Feel overwhelmed or shut down easily
- Show low confidence about their abilities
- Keep changing direction with no clarity

This is very common — and very workable with the right guidance.

8. How career coaching can help

Career coaching provides a structured way to help teens:

- Understand their strengths and interests
- Explore realistic pathways
- Reduce overwhelm and confusion
- Build confidence in decision-making
- Create a clear next-step plan

Sometimes an outside perspective helps teens open up in ways they can't at home.

Final message

Your teen doesn't need to have everything figured out right now.

They need:

- Time
- Exploration
- Support
- And the right conversations

Clarity doesn't come from pressure — it comes from guidance.