& Parents Carers

A pull-out guide for parents and carers

Helping your children with their learning and career choices

This guide tells you about the main changes to education and training. It also offers some practical tips on how you can help your teenager to make the right choices for them.

Changes in education and training give today's teenagers more choices than ever before. Deciding what to do can excite, confuse and worry them all at the same time. You know your children best and have a vital role in helping them to choose well now and in the future. The evidence shows that teenagers value what their parents and carers think, even if their behaviour may suggest otherwise.

CHANGES IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Purpose

With an increasingly global economy, young people in the UK will need higher skill levels than in the past. Education and training are being reformed to meet the needs of the changing world. The aim is to make sure that:

- all young people gain the skills they need for learning, work and adult life – including good standards of English and mathematics
- there is an option to suit every young person
- every option leads to a choice of pathways through learning and into work.

Essential skills

All learning programmes and most qualifications now cover essential skills for learning, work and adult life. Functional skills are the practical skills in English, mathematics and ICT that we all use every day and are now taught in the secondary curriculum. Functional skills are part of the Diploma and, from September 2010, GCSEs and Apprenticeships.

Improving options

Action to make sure that there is a suitable option for every young person includes:

- developing new learning programmes and pathways for young people who need extra support to build their confidence and gain basic qualifications
- strengthening existing qualifications like GCSE and A Level so that they remain fit for purpose and equip young people for higher study and employment
- introducing the Diploma, a brand new qualification. With its mix of classroom activities and hands-on experience, it suits teenagers of all abilities who enjoy learning in a practical way that relates to real life. It is available at Foundation, Higher and Advanced levels. Not all Diploma subjects are available in all areas at the moment and your teenager should check with their school or college to find out what is available
- expanding Apprenticeships for those seeking a work-based route to success. Apprenticeships enable young people to gain qualifications whilst in employment. In some areas, Young Apprenticeships are on offer for 14-16 year olds
- guaranteeing all 16 and 17 year olds an offer of an appropriate place in learning through the September Guarantee.

Supporting progression

The changes ensure that all options lead somewhere. Young people can change direction later on if they wish, but should check that the options they select do not restrict their future choices.

FIND OUT MORE

Look at the expanded, online version of this guide at **www.connexions-direct.com/parentcarer** where you can also access pdf and text only versions of this insert. Also visit the 'Parents' and 'Young people' sections of **www.direct.gov.uk.** If you do not have a computer at home, you can access the internet at your local public library or Connexions centre.

HELPING YOUR CHILDREN TO CHOOSE WELL

Good information is the key to making successful choices. Helping your teenager make choices that work for them, means checking that they know what their options are and where their strengths and interests lie.

Options information

There are fewer options at key stage 4 than post-16 as some subjects are compulsory. Everyone has to study English, mathematics and science, for example.

How you can support your teenager

Help them to find out as much as they can about the courses and qualifications on offer. Encourage them to:

- read the information they get from school – if they are choosing options for key stage 4, check that they know which subjects are compulsory and which are optional
- use their local online 14-19 prospectus to get more information about local opportunities — they can find this at **www.direct.gov.uk/14-19prospectus**
- make a list of any questions they have about the options that interest them, where they lead and the financial help available
- talk to the people who know what they need to know – for example, the people running and taking the options that interest them, their teachers, careers co-ordinator and Connexions personal adviser
- sign up for course tasters and visits to find out more about what an option involves
- check application deadlines, especially post-16, as popular options can fill up quickly.

Better qualifications bring better job prospects, higher earnings and more job satisfaction. Jobs for people without qualifications are disappearing quickly. If your teenager is deciding what to do post-16, encourage them to choose an option that involves further learning, including to higher education. Remind them that no route is closed to them because of their background, and that most young people continue in education or training when they leave school.

Strengths and interests

Your teenager is much more likely to succeed if their choices fit their strengths and interests.

Help them to identify their strengths and interests

Encourage them to talk about:

- their best and least favourite lessons
- their spare time activities
- how they feel about different types of lessons
- how they feel about tests, exams and practical projects.

You could also work with them on the activities in **Which way now?** which looks at key stage 4 choices, or **It's your choice** which looks at post-16 choices.

If they think better when working online, encourage them to use the interactive versions of the magazines at **www.connexions-direct.com/whichwaynow** and **www.connexions-direct.com/itsyourchoice**

Help them to see the connections between what they choose to do now and what they want to do in the future

Encourage them to talk about their hopes and visions for the future and any ideas they have about work or study. Reassure them that it is all right if they have no clear plans. They can choose options that give them plenty of choice in the future.

If they have a fixed career in mind, they may need specific experience, subjects, qualifications and grades to do it. Encourage them to find out by looking up careers that interest them on **jobs4u** at **www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u** and looking at course entry requirements in their local online 14-19 prospectus.

Gently challenge any choices that concern you

For example, you might want to challenge a choice because you feel that your teenager has:

- not done enough research
- over or particularly underestimated their interest and ability in a subject
- been too heavily influenced by who they think will teach the course, what their friends say or fear of being the only boy or girl in a group.

Support their decisions

If you disagree with your teenager's choices, try to give in gracefully. Show them that you want the best for them by accepting that it is their choice. If at a later date they realise that they made the wrong decision, they will need your support to deal with the consequences.

Encourage them to make a back-up plan

They may not be able to do the combination of things they want to do for a variety of practical reasons. Having a back-up plan will make them feel as though they still have some control over what happens.

OTHER FORMATS

This publication is available in Braille and audio CD. Please call DCSF Publications on: **0845 602 2260** or email **connexions@prolog.uk.com** to order copies.

Translations available

Text only versions of the **Parents & Carers** insert are available in Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Punjabi, Somali, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese to download from the website at **www.connexions-direct.com/parentcarer**

WHO CAN HELP YOU?

You can ask subject teachers and form tutors for help. You can also consult the people and organisations below. Find out more in the full version of this guide at www.connexions-direct.com/parentcarer

Speak to your teenager's Connexions personal adviser

Personal advisers offer information, advice and guidance on courses, training opportunities, careers and other issues that concern teenagers, their parents and carers. You can arrange to see your teenager's adviser at school or at your local Connexions centre.

Connexions personal advisers and school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCO) give teenagers with special needs and disabilities extra support with transition planning. In Years 9, 10 and 11, alongside the yearly requirement to review the statement of special educational needs, a transition plan for adulthood must also be developed. The transition plan should be drawn up with the teenager at the centre of the discussion focusing on their interests and what they would like to do in the future, considering all options with them and their parents and carers. Other professionals involved in a teenager's life may also contribute. Once the Transition Plan is in place, the Connexions personal adviser will help put it into action, including building in the teenager's specific support needs. Connexions can continue to provide support until the age of 25.

Use Connexions Direct

This service for 13 to 19 year olds offers quick access to information and advice on a wide range of issues that affect teenagers. Access is through a website or through contact with a Connexions Direct adviser. The website has a careers database **jobs4u** at **www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u**. Connexions Direct advisers are available for young people from 8am to 2am, seven days a week by telephone, text or email at **www.connexions-direct.com**

Use Directgov at www.direct.gov.uk

This is a one-stop-shop for information about public services. Browse the 'Parents' and 'Young people' sections to find all the information you need on young people's choices, financial support for learning and sources of help.

Get in touch with Parentline Plus

One of the voluntary sector organisations supported under the Parent Know How programme **www.dcsf.gov.uk/parentknowhow**. They offer free advice and guidance to parents on anything to do with parenting. You can call a 24-hour helpline on **0808 800 2222** or access information and email support through the website at **www.parentlineplus.org.uk**
Parentline Plus also runs an online social media 'school gate' community. Visit **www.gotateenager.org.uk** to find out more.

MONEY MATTERS

Learning is vital to your teenager's future success, and money worries should not stop them from staying in learning. If they are over 16, they may be able to get some financial help. For example, they could get help with:

- Day-to-day learning costs – the **Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)** is a government-run scheme giving eligible young people a maximum of £30 a week to help them stay in learning. The amount they get depends on household income but does not affect other household benefits
- Childcare – **Care to Learn** provides funds to help young parents pay for childcare while they learn
- Meeting specific needs arising from a **disability or learning difficulty** – there is a wide range of support available. Your teenager's Connexions personal adviser can help you identify what support your teenager may be able to get
- Studying for specialist qualifications – there is a limited number of **scholarships and study awards** for teenagers who want to do specialist qualifications in areas like dance and drama. They help towards living costs and tuition fees that government funding does not cover
- The costs of further education – schools and colleges have **discretionary support funds** to help post-16 students who are in great financial need. School and college Student Support Officers can provide more information
- Higher education – young people can access a mix of **grants and repayable loans**. The amount they get generally depends on household income.

FIND OUT MORE

For more information on the financial help available visit **www.direct.gov.uk/moneytolearn** and **www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance**

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE DECISIONS ARE MADE?

Over the next few years, your teenager may need a helping hand with managing their learning, dealing with personal problems and making more learning and career choices.

Managing learning

Whatever options they choose, teenagers have to get to grips with organising their learning, doing research, meeting deadlines for handing in work and revising effectively. You can help your teenager get better at these things if you know how they learn best.

Have you ever wondered why your teenager wants to listen to music, say things aloud or get up and move about when they are learning? It could be their learning style in action. Everyone uses sight, hearing and touch to help them learn. Some use one sense more than the others and this affects their learning style.

LEARNERS WHO RELY ON SIGHT

- make lots of detailed notes
- close their eyes to remember things
- like colourful presentations
- find something to watch when bored

If this is your teenager, encourage them to

- find a quiet place to work
- use colour to highlight important text
- turn notes and handouts into charts, diagrams and pictures

LEARNERS WHO RELY ON SOUND

- read out loud and talk about their learning
- like spoken instructions
- enjoy explaining things to other people
- hum or talk to themselves when bored

If this is your teenager, encourage them to

- take part in discussions and debates
- read things out loud
- repeat facts with their eyes closed
- use music, jingles and rhymes to remember things

LEARNERS WHO RELY ON TOUCH

- learn by doing things
- fidget and doodle a lot
- need to be active and take regular breaks
- distract others when bored

If this is your teenager, encourage them to

- move around and use actions or role play to learn new things
- listen to music when working
- work with other people
- use bright colours to highlight important text

Dealing with personal problems

At some point, most teenagers have concerns that make it hard for them to cope with other parts of their life. You can help them to tackle these concerns by:

- offering them support as soon as you spot a problem – it is always better to get involved earlier rather than later
- listening to what they say and looking at the problem from their point of view
- working on a solution with them – involving others and asking for expert help from a school, college, training provider or Connexions personal adviser if necessary
- boosting their confidence by helping them to recognise their successes and new achievements
- encouraging them to make the most of opportunities like mentoring, coaching, work experience, volunteering and schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Making more learning and career choices

At ages 17 and 18, your teenager's options could include:

- studying for higher level qualifications at college or university – they could study full or part-time and do a subject-based course, a work-related course that boosts their understanding of an industry sector, or a job-related course that enables them to do a specific job
- taking a year out – many young people take a gap year before moving on to the next stage of their career path and spend it working or travelling
- applying for an Apprenticeship
- getting a job – hopefully with training
- working for themselves – self-employment is a tough option so if this interests your teenager, encourage them to seek expert advice as soon as possible.

You can help them navigate their way through these choices by encouraging them to answer three questions:

- Where am I now?
- Where do I want to be?
- How will I get there?

As they are exploring their options, remind them that learning pays. There is a big pay gap between people with qualifications and those without. If they start their working life in a low skilled, low paid job without training, they may find it very hard to move on to something better.