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Many teens hold jobs during the high school years. A job can have positive and negative consequences for teens. Working may increase responsibility, self-esteem, feelings of competence, and independence. But sometimes first jobs can be routine and lead to negative interactions with adults. It is important to remember that teens are still developing physically, intellectually, and emotionally and that their development can influence their skills and abilities on the job.

The benefits of work

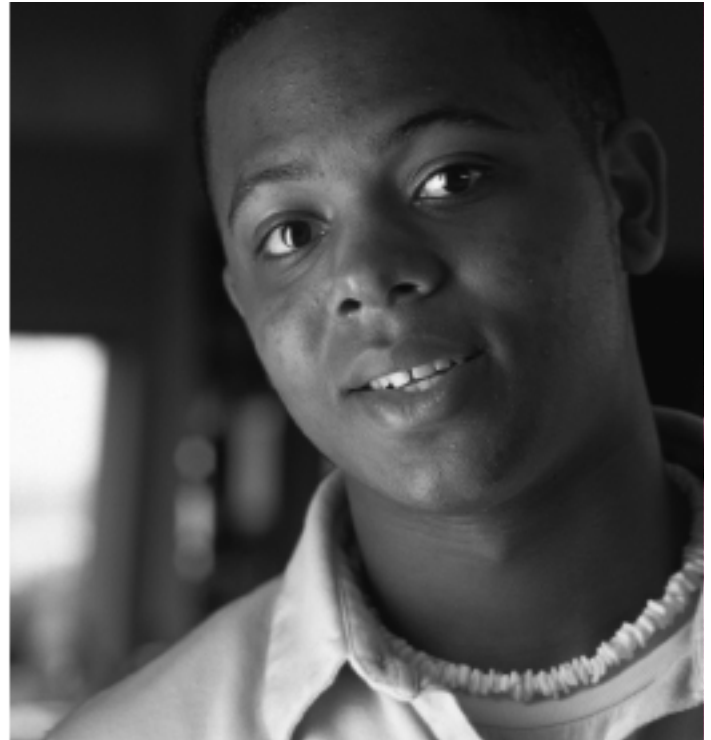
Through employment, young people can learn ways to manage time and money, carry out instructions, adapt to rules and routines in the workplace, and work effectively with others. They can develop valuable skills relating to future careers and may have contact with adult employers who can give positive recommendations. In fact, youth who work limited hours (less than 20 hours a week) are more likely to be employed after high school and have a better chance of earning higher wages after graduation.

Employment can also allow savings toward future education. For some families, it may be necessary for teens to contribute to the family's income or pay for their own needs.

The downside of work

When teenagers work more than 20 hours a week, negative effects may overshadow positive gains. Parents need to look at the tradeoffs for youth employment.

Studies have found that teenagers who work more than 20 hours a week are more likely to experience detrimental effects in their school, family and personal lives. Adolescents who work half time or more report higher levels of emotional distress, substance abuse, and earlier sexual activity. Other adverse



consequences of working long hours include: fatigue, sleep deprivation, less exercise, less family time, poor school performance, and problems with the law.

Working long hours is not the only problem teens might experience as a result of holding a job. At times teens will spend earnings on frivolous items that contribute little to health or well being. Sometimes youth are exposed to older co-workers who may provide access to alcohol or drugs.

State and federal laws

State and federal labor laws set the minimum age standards for minors who work. State law often limits the number of hours per day and week as well as the times of day that minors can work. Typically, the number of hours minors may work on school days will be less than on no-school days.

The U.S. Department of Labor requires that in most cases youth must be at least 14 years old to work. Laws regulate the type of work a minor may perform. Often, teens under 18 are prohibited from holding certain jobs and from operating specific machinery due to safety risks.

Keep in mind that most states establish the maximum (not the ideal) number of hours that minors may work. Caution is recommended in determining just how many hours of paid work are healthy for your teen. School responsibilities should not be sacrificed. Youth who try to juggle both are often faced with 50, 60, or even 70 hour combined school and work weeks.

Whether or not your teen works and how many hours he or she works should be decided by considering age, maturity level, nature of the work, and school performance. Consider carefully if a job will benefit a teen that is struggling in school, especially if the work is boring and doesn't relate to his or her interests. Your teen already has a full-time job getting an education without letting work interfere.

Parents make a difference!

Parents play an important role in helping their teen have a positive working experience. They can help the teen select a safe, appropriate place of employment. Teens can benefit from participating in a variety of activities that includes family, peers, school, community, and paid work.

- Talk with teens about why they want to get a job. Discuss issues such as how it will affect school performance and time away from other valuable activities. Give working a trial period to see how the teen manages. Establish standards that your teen should meet in order to keep working.
- Discuss job possibilities with your teen. Help think through opportunities for learning skills relating to future goals and work environment safety.
- Practice interviewing with your teen. Play the role of the employer and ask your teen questions about career goals, strengths and weaknesses.

- Talk with your teen about job offers. Will this job be challenging or boring? Will it bring your teen into contact with respected and skilled adults? Will the supervisor respect the need to work limited hours? What is the employer's policy on breaks, overtime pay and time off?
- Work with your teen to set up a plan for the money they earn. What should be saved and what can go for day-to-day needs and wants?
- Get information from your state's department of labor on rules regarding the type and hours of work for youth. Inquire about what equipment youth are restricted from operating.
- Keep track of the number of hours your teen works and monitor activity before and after work hours.
- Track how your teen is doing in school. School performance is too important to be sacrificed for work. Although work can be important to development, it should not undermine a young person's education.

Where you can go for more information:

Families with Teens – University of Minnesota Extension
www.extension.umn.edu/familieswithteens/

Family Education
www.familyeducation.com

Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry
www.dli.mn.gov/LS/ChildLabor.asp

Youth Rules – U. S. Department of Labor
www.youthrules.dol.gov/

You may also want to look at:

Mortimer, J. T. (2005). *Working and growing up in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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