

Building Skills for the Future



Rebecca and Eric have different goals after high school. One is looking forward to college; the other is eager to land a job right away. Yet the way they are preparing for their futures is remarkably similar. Both have taken a broad range of courses, held jobs, and participated in extracurricular activities.

Whether your high schooler wants to impress a college admissions officer or a potential employer, he needs to gather a variety of skills and experiences. Here are some suggestions to help him along the way.

It's academic!

Starting in their freshman year, students should begin working toward their future goals.

- Have your teen ask her guidance counselor for help in creating a four-year plan (if your child is older, this can be a three-year or two-year plan). Having a strategy will ensure that she takes the classes she needs for college or work. Her counselor can advise her about course requirements for college (foreign language, math levels), as well as internships or on-the-job training that will appeal to employers.

- Encourage your child to keep his grade point average up throughout high school. Colleges view grades as good indicators of how well students will perform on campus. For job-bound teens, doing well in school shows employers they can manage time wisely, follow directions, work efficiently, and thrive under pressure.

- Remind your teenager that a good school attendance record is also important. Companies want workers they can depend on. And college success requires a commitment to classes.

On the job

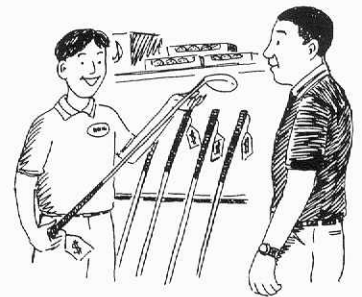
The jobs your teenager holds while in high school will help her pick up valuable experience for the future. They also tell a lot about her character and work ethic.

- Jobs can provide crucial exposure to workplace technology and systems. Suggest that your teen try to be trained on as many different computers and machines as possible. This will show a willingness to learn and an aptitude for technology—traits that look good on job applications. Being in the workforce also teaches “people skills,” including how to get along with others, communicate well, and resolve conflicts. Your child can list these skills when he applies to colleges or companies.

- A history of increasing responsibility (clerk, crew leader, assistant manager) shows colleges and employers that your child has leadership potential. And sticking with a job for six months to a year or more demonstrates perseverance. Your high schooler will be able to point to this “real world” success on college and job applications.

- Encourage your teen to do her best on the job and to take pride in her work. If she's applying to college, her boss may be an excellent source for a letter of recommendation. If she's moving into the workforce, she'll want her supervisor to give a good reference to prospective employers.

- Recommend that your teen keep a record of “success stories” at work. Did he help a customer with a specific problem? Was he able to win over a frustrated shopper? Having these details will give him something to add to applications and talk about during interviews.



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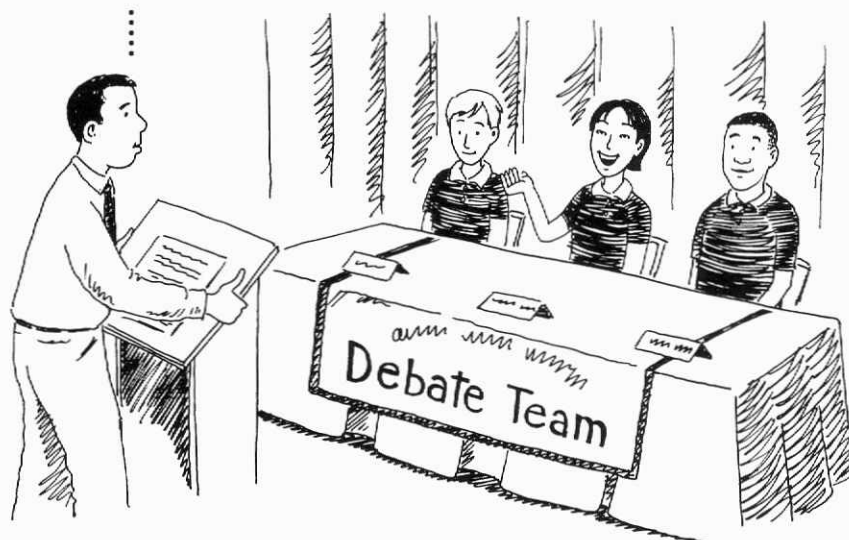
A well-rounded life

In addition to the classes your teen has taken or the jobs she has held, colleges and employers are looking for evidence of a full life. Having a range of experiences demonstrates that your teen is ready for the challenges of college and the business world.

● Extracurricular activities—such as debate team, drama club, 4-H, or sports—teach the value of teamwork and commitment. They also give your child a chance to earn awards, and both college and job applications will ask about honors received. Finally, after-school activities can give your teen an opportunity for leadership positions (tennis team captain, yearbook editor), which both colleges and employers like to see.



● Suggest that your teenager find opportunities to volunteer while in high school. This will show that he cares about others and contributes to the community. He could read to nursing home residents, help plant a community garden, volunteer with the local fire department, or teach soccer to younger children.



The “X” factor

There are many qualified applicants for each college spot and job opportunity. Help your teenager find something unusual or special that will make him stand out from the crowd. He could be a Big Brother to a disadvantaged child, launch his own computer repair business, or speak at elementary schools about how he overcame his learning disability. These kinds of experiences provide terrific topics for college essays or job applications. Encourage your teen to follow his interests, and he’s likely to find something that will get him noticed.

Skill builders

Share this list of important skills with your teenager. Mastering each one will help lead to success in high school and beyond.

✔ **Work habits.** Knowing how to take good notes, study for exams, and complete assignments will enable your high schooler to learn and work effectively.

✔ **Researching.** The ability to narrow a topic, develop a thesis statement, and find good information will help your child build the thinking skills needed now and later.

✔ **Communication.** Knowing how to listen, speak, and write effectively is crucial to school and job success. Have your teen look for opportunities to sharpen these skills, such as practicing a class presentation at home and keeping a daily journal.

✔ **Decision making.** Once your teen is out of high school, he will be faced with choices on a daily basis. Help him learn how to evaluate information, list options, and predict outcomes. Encourage him to try different methods (making a pro-and-con list, seeking advice, doing research) for developing good decision-making strategies.

✔ **Time management.** In college and on the job, your teenager will have to finish tasks on time and keep track of classes, meetings, and events. Suggest that she write everything in a day planner (print, computer, or handheld) and check it every day.



High School Years