

Career Conversation Starters

Minus the “what do you want to be when you grow up?”

This guide is designed to help prompt career conversations that will lead to fuller answers and better-quality exploration. Who will find it most useful?

- Parents and guardians who don't know how to help their kids navigate the reams of information out there on career planning and education options.
- Educators who are trying to prompt good discussion on career exploration in the classroom or looking for inspiration for assignments in careers classes.
- Students from Grade 6 to post-secondary who either have zero career ideas or about a hundred, and don't know how to get started with career exploration.

Conversation #1: talk about your education biases.

I grew up in a family of tradespeople and was encouraged toward university from a very young age because I was "smart enough to go." My partner grew up in a family of tradespeople who thought university was a waste of money. Grown-ups' experiences with education shapes how they talk to kids about education.

Conversation Starters

- What kind of education do the grown-ups in this scenario have?
- When did grown-ups finish their education? Or, are they finished with it?
- What kind of education do grown-ups think is important for kids, and why?
- What do you know about university? College? Apprenticeship? Military?

Activities

1. Pick an industry. Find out about **one** career in that industry from **each** post-secondary pathway.
2. Visit any university website and find their continuing education or professional learning pages. What kinds of courses, programs and certifications do they offer to working professionals?
3. Visit any community college website and find their degree pathways section. What opportunities exist to transfer credits from college to university?
4. Explore a skilled trade you've never heard of before. Find out general responsibilities, average wages, length of apprenticeship and 3 organizations that could employ that role.



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

Conversation #2: talk about career chaos events.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted work on a scale and with a rapidity that hadn't been seen since WWII. However, instances of career chaos happen on a much smaller scale and in everyday life. (And let's hope we're not looking at a covid-level pandemic for a good long time.)

What's a career chaos event? Something that completely disrupts someone's career unexpectedly and without warning. A few examples: a new baby, a death in the family, corporate takeovers, moving, a promotion, prejudice in the workplace that blocked new opportunities and promotions.

Conversation Starters

Whoever prompts the conversation, grown-ups can touch on these areas about career chaos events:

- What happened?
- How did you react? What did you do?
- Who did you turn to for help? Or who volunteered to help?
- How did the situation turn out?
- Were there residual effects from the situation, and were they positive or negative?
- What did you learn from the situation?
- If a similar situation arose again, what would you do and why?

Activities

1. Plan a hypothetical work pause (AKA a gap year or a sabbatical). If you had 1 year off, paid, how would you use it to advance your career or prepare for a career change?
2. Brainstorm as many different career chaos events as you can.
3. Write out a few examples of career chaos on little pieces of paper. Fold them up and put them in a hat. Draw one out and talk out together how you could navigate the situation.

Conversation #3: talk about the work environment.

Youth career exploration is almost solely about what the job is. There is usually a general sense of where it happens (indoors vs. outdoors, clinic vs. factory), but rarely does it involve considerations of the holistic workplace environment: policies, systems and people.

Conversation starters

- What do the grown-ups in this conversation like about their workplace?
- What would they change if they could?
- What expectations do the kids and the grown-ups have for their coworkers? What about supervisors?
- What do work hours look like? How does the rest of life fit (or not) around those hours?

Activities

1. Design an ideal workspace. Think big! What colours, equipment or tools are in the space? What does the organizational chart look like? What are your hours? What do you wear to work?
2. Work together to help the kid describe a perfect supervisor for them. The grown-up can provide context of a supervisors' role, including their own experiences.
3. Brainstorm on what it means to be a good coworker. What qualities can you embody to be a good coworker? How can you use those qualities in different areas of your life right now?

Looking for more ways to explore career options?

Connect with me on [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

Join the [Career Influencers Club on Facebook](#).

Learn more about programs and workshops at [careerified.ca](#).