Helping teens prepare for summer work

As summer rolls in and school break approaches many restless youths and anxious parents are beginning to wonder what to do about summer break. A summer job is a great way for teens (provided they're ready and willing) to gain new life experience, learn to take on new responsibilities and maybe even earn a little extra money. Prepare teens for the working world by helping them:

Choose a goal. This is a great time to sit down with your teen and discuss their future career and educational goals. Your tech savvy son may want to investigate jobs at an electronics store or even working as a counsellor at a computer camp. Does your daughter constantly dream up creative business ideas? Look into programs that help students, both financially and through training, start their own business. Don't worry if your teens still don't have a clue: summer jobs are a great opportunity to "try on" different career hats.

Remain realistic. While your teen may have visions of managing a store or instantly becoming a leading graphic designer, ensure they understand that career building is a life-long process. Work, especially when starting out, can be less than exciting or glamorous. Help frame the big picture: a summer job is a valuable stepping stone to bigger and better things down the line.

Consider volunteer options. Volunteering is a great way for young people to build job skills and work experience to put on their resume, especially when starting out. Depending on the type of volunteer job, it can also help give your teen a greater appreciation for things—their health, stability, shelter, etc.—they'd normally take for granted.

Create a resume. These days, even part-time retail jobs are requesting resumes. This can be a real challenge for young people and their parents, especially if they've never had a "real job." Openly discuss the skills and abilities your teen brings to the table and how they've been applied. Dig a little deeper and together you may discover your child has already had lots of "mini" jobs. Serving on student council, being an active member of the school orchestra or fundraising for a local kids group are all potential additions to a resume as they show commitment, leadership and reliability. Enlist the support of a word-savvy relative or friend if you don't feel confident in your resume writing skills or look online under "resume samples" to get a better sense of different resume styles and options.

Practice. Interviews are nerve wracking for the most experienced of workers, but especially so when you've never done one. Take on the role of an employer and ask your teen job-related questions so that your child is well prepared to talk about his or her strengths, weaknesses and accomplishments. It's also a good idea to present a few "what if" situational challenges and to go over appropriate responses to these kinds of problem-solving questions.

Understand what's appropriate. Every parent hopes their teen will do a good job and be a hard worker, but it shouldn't be at the expense of their physical or emotional well-being. Help kids recognize what is and isn't appropriate behaviour at work—both for your teen and his or her supervisor. Let teens know to speak up—either to a higher up or to you—if they feel their safety is threatened or if they're being physically or verbally harassed at work. Make sure they understand that physical or emotional insecurity should never be part of the job description.

Partnering with your teen to prepare, explore job options and approach work with realistic expectations can help set your child up for success now and down the road. While your teen isn't likely to land their "dream job" just yet, a summer job is a great opportunity to explore interests, learn about managing responsibilities and begin a promising career path.