

Pursuing Their Dreams: Career Exploration for High School Students

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“At first Andrew didn’t want to take your Career Exploration class, but it turned out to be one of his favorites,” the enthusiastic mother told me. I had just completed a semester-long class for eighth-twelfth graders at our homeschool co-op. The 17 teenagers relished studying themselves!

My two semesters of experience teaching career exploration were rewarding for both my students and me. I purposely shared with the students my own experiences of searching for a career that uses both my talents and skills, but also fits my priorities. I tried to impress on them the joy they will experience when they find God’s plan for their future. You, too, can guide your high school student to discover his real self—what the Lord made him to be. Here are some ideas, resources, and curricula that you can use to develop a career exploration plan for your student.

Career Exploration Is a Process, Not a Point

Process is the goal in teaching a career exploration class. Express to your students that they may not know specifically what they want to be, but they will gain the tools that will allow them to search and plan better.

My hope was that each student would finish my class with three possible careers they could pursue or at least a general idea of a path to follow. My own life has had several career explorations. During high school, I decided on a college major. In choosing engineering, I considered my skills and abilities, but since I wasn’t a Christian, I didn’t consider Godly priorities, such as family. After I became a Christian and mother, my priorities changed and I had another period of career investigation. I found accounting to be to my liking and very flexible. I retrained, became a CPA, and now work part-time as a self-employed accountant. As a result, my career choice is an excellent fit of career and family for me. So, my personal experiences, mistakes and all, were helpful in teaching my class the process of career exploration.

The 4-Step Career Exploration Process

In order to explore possibilities for the careers they may be interested in, students work through these four steps:

1. Investigate: Discover your personality, abilities, skills, and priorities.
2. Match possible careers to your personality.
3. Research potential careers to see if there is a fit.
4. Prepare a plan to pursue your career choice.

By way of example, my 14-year-old daughter, Emily, learned from the class that she was organized, encouraging, and detailed-oriented. Personality tests matched her traits to

several careers. She researched about six careers in detail. She rejected some upon learning more about them and ultimately settled on pharmacy, teaching, and accounting. Her plan is to take biology and chemistry classes in the next two years. If Emily likes those subjects, she may pursue pharmacy. If not, she may become an accountant. She also volunteers her time teaching a children's Sunday school class to see if she would enjoy being a teacher.

Helpful Resources

The most helpful tool for teaching the career exploration process is a curriculum called *Youth Exploration Survey (YES!)*. It is published by Crown Ministries, a Christian nonprofit organization that teaches money management skills and offers career guidance materials. I used the *YES!* books as the core text in my class. They cover each step of the process. *YES!* includes several personality and interest surveys. After taking these surveys and choosing matching careers, the student researches possible occupations. They look for a good fit using a helpful "roadmap" with many decision checkpoints along the way. The last checkpoint is matching a career with a student's priorities. This keeps the students focused on God's will for them. The curriculum was very biblically based. It encouraged the students to discover the unique way that God has made them. *YES!* may be used by an individual or in a group setting.

The students also had to pick one book from topics that included career exploration, high school planning, college preparation, or study habits. Two books that were very popular were *Do What You Are* and *What Color Is Your Parachute?* In *Do What You Are* the reader takes a personality test and then researches matching career choices. *Parachute* is a classic career search guide that provides practical advice on looking for a job or changing careers. The students also used some free online personality tests. There are many resources for career exploration both at libraries and online. See Resources at the end of this article for a few to get you started.

After picking four to six possible careers, a student should carefully research them. They should investigate the working conditions, skills needed, pay rates, and future outlook for their chosen fields. For conducting research online, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has a valuable site (see Resources).

Having a Goal

The last step in the career exploration process is creating an education and experience plan to meet the student's goals. Students need to think about what classes and part-time jobs they can pursue today to prepare them for their future. If a student has a goal in sight, her schoolwork and part-time jobs become more meaningful. Information can be found in several homeschooling books on high school planning. I found that *High School: A Home Designed Form + U + La* by Barbara Shelton was very helpful. It covers designing a class and how to record accomplishments and experiences. Your student should also learn what graduation requirements are in your state and also what most colleges expect. All this information is online, and the College Board

(www.collegeboard.com) website is helpful. Then your student can make a high school plan that is unique to him or her. In my class, David was a student considering engineering. His plan includes a full load of math and science classes. In contrast, Sarah is interested in acting as a career, so she was encouraged to participate in a summer drama camp run by a local Christian high school.

Life Is an Adventure

The career exploration experience may trigger something dynamic for your student. It did in my class. A metamorphosis occurred as the students began to chart a career path with manageable steps to get there. Encourage your high schoolers to consider carefully how they manage their time, what kind of classes they select, and what kind of part-time jobs they have had. Each decision in life can open doors that will lead them on the path to their goals and dreams. Life is an exciting adventure for teenagers. I was so fortunate to be a part of the process of seeing them grow up. I hope you too will enjoy guiding your students to investigate their personalities, match them with potential careers, research occupations to find a good fit, and then execute a plan to reach their goals.

Resources for Career Exploration

Books

- ✎ *YES! Youth Exploration Survey*
Crown Ministries
1-800-722-1976
www.crown.org/yesresources
- ✎ *Do What You Are* by Paul Tieger
- ✎ *What Color Is Your Parachute?* by Richard Bolles
- ✎ *High School: A Home Designed Form + U + La* by Barbara Shelton

Websites

- ✎ www.careerkey.org —Personality test related to occupations
- ✎ www.career.missouri.edu —A career interests game
- ✎ www.stats.bls.gov/oco —Occupational Outlook Handbook online
- ✎ www.collegeboard.com/plan —College preparation information

Biographical Information

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Carol Topp has had several careers, including wife, mother, industrial engineer, and accountant. She is now enjoying a season of homeschooling her two daughters and running a home-based accounting practice. She teaches career exploration and personal finance classes at her homeschool co-op in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her website is www.HomeschoolCPA.com.