

# A GUIDE TO CAREER CONVERSATIONS



## EXPLORING CAREERS WITH CHILDREN (Grades K-6)

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## Discovering interests and creating career curiosity

Young children draw from the people in their lives to answer questions and to provide guidance. Talking to children from K-6 about what activities they like doing best is a great way to begin the conversation. Young children have a lot of questions. Being involved with answering questions about jobs and careers can be very rewarding.

Whether a parent, educator or other trusted advisor, being a part of conversations about career interest and skills development with children is an important first step in creating the building blocks of “career literacy.”

## HOW THE “WORLD OF WORK” IS EXPERIENCED AT THIS AGE

Younger children don’t really know what their parents do all day long and may not understand why their parents must go to work. Young children begin to think about careers and jobs based on what their parents/guardians do for a living and through their exposure to other professionals. In addition, children’s programs on social media and television provide an opportunity for more exposure to what people do at their jobs.

In the community, children are exposed to different careers through extracurricular activities. Seeing other adults in the community in different jobs can also begin to create interest. Going to doctor and dentist appointments and observing other adults at work (such as firefighters, police officers, construction crews, flight attendants on airplanes, servers in restaurants) can all be the beginning stage of career impressions.

At school and in organized activities, children will begin to build the skills and learn behaviours that will serve them well as they hone in on career options and get part-time jobs in their early teens.



## WHAT IS HAPPENING AT SCHOOL

K-6 educators begin to introduce basic skills to children. Additional activities such as extracurricular clubs are available depending on the school that the child attends. At school, children may also have opportunities to hear about other job choices through Career Days, assemblies and field trips.

Group work, individual work, cooperation, collaboration, empathy, creativity, and public speaking are all an integral part of the K-6 experience. In the classroom, students are exposed to future skills that can be built upon as they continue to go through life.

K-6 students may have an “All About Me” portfolio. It contains materials, information, and personal reflections compiled by the student, with the support of the teacher.

In Grade 6, parents will have the opportunity to attend Information Nights to learn about programs available in middle school.



# HOW YOU CAN HELP

## Encourage your children to:

Talk about what they and their friends want to do when they grow up.

Pretend – open a shop, set up an art show, run a restaurant, be a vet.

Pursue a wide range of interests and try new things.

Ask other family members about their jobs.

Talk about jobs they see on TV or read about.

Being open-minded and encouraging allows for children to try new activities and express their views on what they think the future holds. It is very likely that children may change their mind – and that’s OK. This is the time for exploration!

### WHAT PARENTS CAN DO:

Talk about what you wanted to do when you grew up at their age.

Ask questions after an activity such as “what did you find the most fun?”, “what was the most challenging?”, “what surprised you?”

Help children see and identify their strengths at an early age and encourage them to continue developing behaviours like sharing, listening, asking questions, trying new things, helping others, etc.

Enrol young children in age appropriate recreation programs and encourage hobbies that provide hands-on exposure to many different things.

Expose children to new ideas through outings to libraries, museums, art galleries, fire stations, festivals, or arts and culture events.

Involve the whole family in group activities such as volunteering, travel, cultural events, community festivals, and visiting the library.

Bring up the topic of careers and jobs with other adults in front of your child; ask others to explain what they do to your child.

## WHAT EDUCATORS CAN DO:

Provide opportunities for parents and other community members to visit the classroom to talk about their jobs. Field trips to fire stations and other places of work can interest children in Grades K-6.

Seek out age appropriate community activities that help children learn about a wide variety of career sectors (museums, art shows, sporting events, STEM programs, musical performances, cultural events) and have a discussion about what careers are possible within these areas.

Encourage students to see the connection between the skills and behaviours learned at school and future employability.

Listen and support student interests and questions. Use their feedback to design field trips, seek out career enrichment opportunities, and plan school assemblies.

Talk about what you wanted to do when you grew up and about teaching as an occupation.

## WHAT OTHER TRUSTED ADVISORS CAN DO:

Share your story – what occupation you are in and what you thought you would do when you grew up.

Allow for time to speak one-on-one with children. Compliment children on what they do well. Interact with parents to pass on observations of what the child seemed to enjoy most.

Encourage the children to see the connection between the skills and behaviours being developed through extracurricular activities and getting a job / being successful in the workplace when they are older.

When possible, include a 10-minute window on either side of the activity to allow for spontaneous conversation opportunities.

Explain to children that making mistakes and not doing things perfectly is part of learning new skills.

## Encourage children to:

Select books to read that are career based.

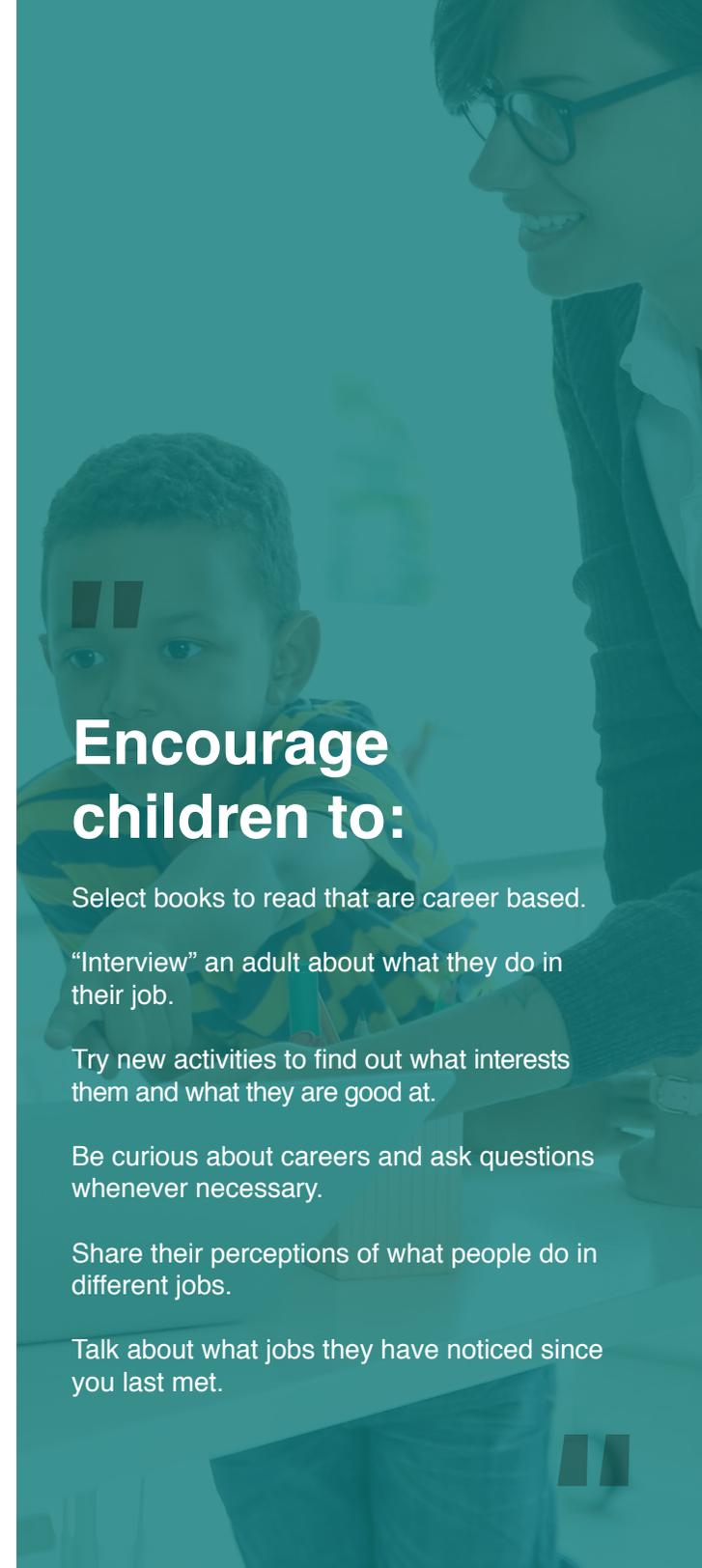
“Interview” an adult about what they do in their job.

Try new activities to find out what interests them and what they are good at.

Be curious about careers and ask questions whenever necessary.

Share their perceptions of what people do in different jobs.

Talk about what jobs they have noticed since you last met.



# AND A LAST WORD FROM THE EXPERTS... ON CAREER CONVERSATIONS WITH CHILDREN

- 1. Create opportunities for career exposure:** Help increase children's awareness of a wide variety of careers by drawing their attention to people enacting different jobs in the child's community. Describe the work that individuals are doing and provide children with a name of the occupation.
- 2. Model curiosity:** Model curiosity about the work of others. Pose questions that you playfully explore and wonder about together. For example: *What does a chef do each day? What decisions do they have to make? What do they like about their job? How did they become a chef? Did they have to go to chef school? Do you think you would like being a chef?*
- 3. Talk about the process:** Use goal-setting to encourage children's understanding of the steps involved with career choice and attainment. For example: *How do you become a doctor?* Brainstorm steps together: *graduate high school, volunteer in a hospital, go to university to study medicine.*
- 4. Ask them to imagine their future:** Promote self-reflection and perspective-taking by asking children to imagine their life in five, 10, or even 20 years. Ask them questions about what they want to do each day, how they want to spend their time, what leisure activities they want to do regularly and what work they might like doing.
- 5. Use the power of play!** Provide opportunities for children to play with toys that represent occupations (e.g., stethoscope, chef's hat) and then explain how these toys are related to careers. For example: *The doctor uses the stethoscope to listen to your heartbeat and breathing and make sure it all sounds normal and healthy. The doctor knows if something is wrong because they learned about it in medical school.*

## CURIOUS TO KNOW MORE?

For an in-depth guide on starting the conversation with children as young as 3-8, download CERIC's [The Early Years: Career Development for Young Children – A Guide for Parents/Guardians](#) or the same guide for [Educators](#).

Excerpt from [Five ways to talk with young children about work and careers](#), CERIC Career Wise article by Kimberly Howard and Stephanie Dinius (2019)