

Parents' Guide for Middle School: Supporting career well-being

A special supplement to Career Key Discovery™

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YOU WANT THE BEST FOR YOUR CHILD—to make a living doing something they enjoy. We all share similar hopes that our children find work that leads to career well-being.

You might ask, how do they get there? What can I do now to help my child find careers that fit and prepare them for success in college and beyond?

In this Guide, we start to answer those questions, based on science, decades of career counseling, and our experiences as parents. We've also given you some book and website resources at the end of this guide to help.

These resources and recommendations, along with Career Key Discovery, will support your child on their journey toward career well-being.

What is career well-being?

Career well-being is feeling good about the work you do. It's answering "Yes" to the question, "Do you like what you do each day?" Career Key's mission is to help you and your child give an emphatic, "Yes!"

Whatever your work is—a paid or unpaid job; pursuing a career; being a good mother or father; volunteering for a social cause; baking a fine cake; or pursuing a particular vocation, sport or hobby—you want to feel good about it. You want to feel positive emotions like pride, excitement, happiness, satisfaction, feeling inspired, energized, or valued and worthwhile.

Together, these positive work experiences increase your overall well-being—your physical vitality, mental eagerness, social satisfaction, sense of meaning and accomplishment, and personal fulfillment.

Gallup's worldwide surveys show that only 20 percent of people answer a strong "Yes" to the question, "do you like what you do each day?" Their research also shows how important career well-being is: people who are high in it are twice as likely to be thriving in their lives overall, than if they are high in social, financial, physical, or community well-being.

Career well-being is one of five interdependent elements of "wellbeing", according to the Gallup authors of *Wellbeing: the Five Essential Elements*. The others are social, financial, physical, and community well-being.

Together, they shape your identity and how well you function. Because each element affects the others, it is important to nurture them all. To learn more about well-being, see our Additional resources section.

You should also know that there is a lively discussion among experts as to what well-being and career well-being are. The field is evolving. For example, a leader in the field, Dr. Martin Seligman, notes,

“. . . there is considerable evidence that a higher level of spirituality goes hand in hand with greater well-being, less mental illness, less substance abuse, and more stable marriages.”

Does this suggest another element: Spiritual well-being?

Experts also argue other elements should be included like engagement (love of learning new things), meaning (what I do in life is valuable, worthwhile), self-esteem, optimism, resilience when things go wrong, and accomplishment.

Quick recap

Feeling good about the work you do, career well-being, has a big impact on your life and well-being in general. Each person can define what it means for them.

Having defined career well-being, let's see how to support and strengthen it using the proven, respected approach to career satisfaction and success used in Career Key Discovery.

Strengthening career well-being

We started with the question, “Do you like what you do each day?” If your answer is “Yes”, you are likely doing something that interests you and fits your personality.

This match-up, between your personality and work environment, affects job satisfaction and performance. It also affects students. Studies show that the match between college students’ personality-major match affects their grades, whether they change their major, and graduating on time.

All of this research is based on [John Holland’s theory of career choice](#). Over a thousand studies have investigated and validated its main ideas.

According to the theory, there are six personality types:

- Realistic (R)
- Investigative (I)
- Artistic (A)
- Social (S)
- Enterprising (E)
- Conventional (C)

And, there are six environments having the same RIASEC names. An environment is created by the personalities of the people in it. So, if a work environment is made up primarily of people having an Artistic personality, together, they create an Artistic environment.

Artistic people generally thrive in this environment; they share similar values, skills, and interests. On the other hand, people having the opposite personality type, Conventional, do less well. Maybe you have experienced this? [More about compatible types](#).

Research shows that the degree of personality-environment fit is positively related to people’s success and satisfaction—like, in a job or college major. This degree of fit is called congruence.

If you are doing work that is congruent with your personality—that matches your interests, skills, and values—you are more likely to be happy and successful.

☑ Quick recap

To strengthen your child’s pathway to career well-being, they should choose work that fits their RIASEC personality profile—their interests, values, skills, and how they see themselves.

Let’s turn now to how we can help our children take steps to finding the right fit at school and in a career.

Actions parents can take

Be a force for good

You know already that you have a big effect on your child’s career and education opportunities. You impact your child’s view of work and their decisions by:

- Attitudes and behaviors you reward
- Your expectations of what they’ll achieve in education and a career
- The example you set
- Your influence on the children and adults with whom they socialize
- The opportunities you offer them to learn and develop
- The kind of relationship you have with your child
- Gender or social biases you have (men can’t be nurses, value of blue-collar vs. white collar jobs)

This seems like a lot to take on, but think of your own attitudes and beliefs about work and education and how they were formed. How did your parents impact your experiences in this area? Chances are, significantly.

Use this awareness to turn your influence into a force for good. It doesn’t take much money but it takes a little time and attention. We know those are in short supply, but this guide suggests some quick wins.

Send growth mindset messages to your child

Start setting up your child for long-term success by treating them with a growth mindset. It's the idea that "we can grow our brain's capacity to learn and to solve problems."

Research shows this mindset will help your child persist and succeed as academics get harder and career demands change over time. They will be less fragile and sensitive to criticism—more resilient and likely to keep learning.

We recommend the parent chapter in Dr. Carol Dweck's bestselling book, *Growth Mindset* or watch her 10-minute video TED Talk about it. You'll see how adopting this view of school and work will help your child—and yourself.

Say no to this fixed mindset view of your child:

"You have permanent traits and I'm judging them."
(You were born this way and that's that)

Say yes to this growth mindset view:

"You are a developing person and I am interested in your development."

Praise wisely:

The process they use, their strategies, effort or choices

"I like how you kept working at the problem until you solved it."

"I like how you learned from your mistake and kept going."

Not so much:

Innate talent or intelligence

"You're so smart!"

"You're so pretty!"

"You've got a gift for math!"

Know yourself

Explore your own career well-being and start asking yourself questions. Are you in a job or role that fits your personality and interests? How satisfied are you and what steps do you need to take to improve upon it?

It's a lot easier to start a conversation with your child about careers when you participate in the process yourself.

Avoid the herd mentality

Don't switch on the auto-pilot when thinking about your child's education and career path. Just because other parents' number one priority is getting their child into a prestigious college, doesn't mean they're right and you should do the same.

Many myths and misperceptions exist about how the education system works and the value of certain careers or college majors. Avoid getting sucked in by hype or fiction by:

- Consciously forming your own opinions
- Doing your own research relying on reputable sources, like non-profit associations
- Taking your time to make decisions
- Be willing to take a stand that differs from friends and family
- Your child is unique and may not fit into the expected/approved timeline or path society or the system has blessed. They are still normal and will achieve career well-being on their own terms.

☑ Quick recap

- You have a big impact, be a force for good!
- Treat your child like they are growing, not smart
- Know yourself
- Form your own opinions, avoid the herd mentality

Explore your child's personality

One of the biggest influences on your child's future job satisfaction and success is choosing a career that matches their strongest Holland personality type and interests. Career Key Discovery helps them do that.

When they complete Career Key Discovery, ask open-ended questions that show your interest like:

- Did you agree with the assessment results? Why or why not?
- Describe the kinds of jobs Career Key said were a good fit for you. Why?
- What careers do you like most so far? Why?

DON'T judge their interests or career choices, like "why would you want to be a plumber? What a stinky job!" Maybe they'll come to that conclusion themselves after learning more about plumbing but maybe not. Maybe that job is not a fit for you personally but it really sparks your child's interest.

Never underestimate the power and influence of a happy, talented plumber...

Opening eyes and exploring the outside world: Activities beyond Career Key Discovery

Middle school students' accurate knowledge about work is often quite limited. They have a fairly narrow view of what jobs exist. For those they do know, they often misunderstand what they do, the education required to become one, and how much money they pay.

Middle school is the perfect time to open up your child's eyes to the opportunities and real-world facts about careers.

How to help your child discover and learn more about careers and activities that really engage and spark their interest:

- Help your child do more online research on their favorite careers from Career Key. We recommend some sites to visit.
- Talk about how they spend their leisure time and what it reveals about their interests, abilities, and what they value (what matters to them).

- Help them identify their motivated skills.

Do this by having them identify three achievements, accomplishments, or similar "good experiences" where they:

- Felt they did something well
- Enjoyed doing it
- Was proud of it

After they rank them and choose their best, ask them:

- What did you do? (examples: worked under pressure, solved a problem)
- How did you do it?
- What happened?

- Encourage and support your child to try out a variety of activities, so they can get a clearer idea of what interests them, what they are good at, and what they don't like. They may need your encouragement as they try something unfamiliar. Examples are:

- Learn a music instrument
- Sign up for a community center class
- Volunteer with a church group
- Join a youth club like 4-H
- Try out a new hobby or sport

- If you have family or friends who work in a career that interests your child, encourage them to set up an informal, informational interview where they ask about what it's like to do that job. If possible, ask if they could visit the adult at their workplace for a tour.

College or specialized training IS the plan

In today's economy, living wage jobs require training and education after college. Four-year college is not necessarily required but at least some specialized training or apprenticeship is. In our opinion, lack of education leads to fewer options and greater financial insecurity—not the ingredients for career well-being.

This doesn't mean your child can't take a break between high school and college. But taking a break with a plan is different than taking a break with no plan.

You can set the stage for college, if you need to, by:

- Communicating your expectations that they will attend some kind of school after high school
- Helping your child become aware of college, visit a couple while in session
- Preparing to financially support their efforts; start saving now for college, if you haven't already
- [Research shows college is worth it](#). But there are definitely ways to prepare and go to college that increase your child's likelihood of success there. Your child should:
 - Take rigorous classes in middle and high school (Don't coast!)
 - Take the highest level of math, science, and technology as they can master in school (Keep career doors open!)
 - Choose a college major that matches their Holland personality and interests (Career Key Discovery)
 - Choose a college based on their college major and career direction
 - Avoid large student debt (choose wisely)

Quick recap

- Help your child discover who they are, what they like
- Explore the outside world, help them to try something new and unfamiliar
- College or specialized training IS the plan

Additional resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP), "Well-being Concepts"
<http://www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm> (accessed 12/21/15)

Dweck, Carol S. (2006). Mindset: The New Psychology of Success.
<http://www.amazon.com/Mindset-The-New-Psychology-Success/dp/0345472322>

Watch TED Talk: "Carol Dweck: The power of believing that you can improve"
https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve?language=en

Rath, T. & Harter, J. (2010). Wellbeing: The five essential elements. New York: Gallup.
<http://www.wbfinder.com/home.aspx>

Seligman, Martin E.P. (2011) Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being. <http://books.simonandschuster.com/Flourish/Martin-E-P-Seligman/9781439190760>

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