

# Life After Graduation

College, vocational training, the workforce, military service... life after high school holds many possibilities. Which path is right for your teenager? Use this guide to explore her options together. Then, take steps now so she'll be on track to achieve her goals. Plus: Check out the important advice on the next page to help make sure she gets her diploma.



## College

The journey to college begins with one step: deciding to go! Now your teen has more choices to make and tasks to complete. Share these questions and answers.

**How do I prepare in high school?** Your child will want to take the right high school classes and get good grades. Have her check with her counselor for diploma requirements. Also, encourage her to focus on just one or two extracurricular activities (that shows commitment) and look for leadership opportunities. And help her sign up for and take any required tests (SAT, ACT).

**How can I pick a college?** It's a good idea to make a checklist that includes factors he's looking for in a school. *Examples:* size (big, small), location (urban, rural, close to home), price range, majors offered. Then, your high schooler could research colleges online and attend college fairs. Help him narrow down his list to schools that check the most boxes for him.

**What about community college?** Tuition is lower at a two-year college, where your teen can earn an associate's degree, then



transfer to a four-year school to complete her bachelor's. Or she might move right into an in-demand occupation, such as veterinary technician or web developer—careers requiring an associate's degree are among the fastest-growing.

## Vocational training

Some students are interested in fields that hire skilled tradespeople, such as automotive technology and cosmetology. If that sounds like your teenager, a vocational program might be a good fit. Consider this advice.

**Start training now.** A career and technical education program in high school could give your teen a solid head start. He'll get hands-on training in fields like agriculture, architecture, manufacturing, and information technology. He can ask his school counselor what's available in his school or district.

### Get a firsthand look.

Suggest that your child talk to people doing the job she's interested in, perhaps a pharmacy technician, an electrician, or a mechanic. What do they like about it? What challenges do they face? They might even let her shadow them for a day.

**Research programs.** Vocational schools (also called trade schools) and most community colleges offer trade and certificate programs. Help your high schooler look up the cost and graduation rate of each program he's considering, as well as whether it's accredited and offers job placement assistance.



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## The workforce

Your high schooler may be eager to start a career and begin earning money right away. Share these tips to make the transition into the workforce a smooth one.

**Gain experience.** Encourage your teen to get a part-time job or to volunteer during high school. He'll get job experience and references to make him a better candidate. *Tip:* Have him create a résumé as early as his freshman year. He could think of it as a work in progress and add to it with each new accomplishment.

**Target the "hot" jobs.** Joining an in-demand or fast-growing field makes it easier for your child to find work now—and move up the ladder later. These include jobs in construction and health care, as well as fitness instructors, flight attendants, chefs, and plumbers. *Tip:* Suggest that she learn about jobs, starting salaries, and required training at [bls.gov/ooh/occupation-finder.htm](http://bls.gov/ooh/occupation-finder.htm).

## Destination: Graduation

Whatever your teenager does next, there's one thing to do *first*: graduate. A high school diploma is a student's ticket to a brighter future. Use these ideas for reaching the finish line.

**Stay involved.** Talk about school *every day*, perhaps by asking how your child's math quiz went or what experiment she did in science. She'll see that her education is important to you. Also, monitor her grades and progress, contact teachers with questions or concerns, and attend events like PTA or PTO meetings and curriculum nights.

**Cheer him on.** Let your teen see your enthusiasm—it's contagious. Rather than saying he *has* to go to school, say that he *gets* to go! Tell him (often) how



**Network in real life.** Tech-focused teens might like job-search sites. But networking is important, too. Suggest that your high schooler let *everyone* know he's looking, and ask them to keep an eye out. *Idea:* Have him write out and practice a two-minute pitch for himself, explaining how he would help a company in his field. He'll know just what to say when he visits potential employers.

## The military

Your high schooler could serve our country while earning a salary and learning skills that are beneficial throughout life. Here's how to help your child decide if the military is the right choice.

**What are the requirements?** To enlist, your teenager must be a U.S. citizen or have a permanent resident card. She also needs to be at least 17 years old, hold a high school diploma or GED, and be physically fit.



**What kind of work could I do?** There are engineers, mechanics, multimedia illustrators, and even musicians among the thousands of occupations in the armed forces. Have your child ask his school counselor about the Student Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. Reviewing the test results with his counselor lets him explore skills, interests, and careers that are a good match for him.

**What's the next step?** Your high schooler might talk to service members and veterans in your community to find out more about military life. Her school counselor can provide additional resources and put her in touch with a recruiter.

proud you are of his hard work. And point out how school will help him reach his goals. Explain that graduates are more likely to be employed and tend to earn more than students who drop out—up to \$300,000 more in a lifetime.

**Get help.** If your high schooler mentions dropping out or you discover she's skipping class, talk to her about what's going on. Then, work with her to find solutions. For example, meet with her school counselor, arrange for tutoring, or suggest that she find a club filled with like-minded classmates. Feeling connected to her school and building relationships will help her stay committed to finishing.

## High School Years