

## **Professor Wendy Johnson answers fundamental questions to Career Guidance**

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### **1. WHAT IS CAREER GUIDANCE?**

Career guidance is helping people get information that will help them decide the kinds of careers they want to pursue, helping them negotiate the things they need to do to get into those careers, and helping them take the initial steps towards establishing themselves there. It's also helping them manage transition steps along the way, and, especially, helping them change careers when that seems the best to them.

### **2. WHAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN CHOOSING CAREERS FOR CHILDREN?**

Children should choose their own careers as they move out of childhood. Others such as parents shouldn't choose careers for them.

### **3. I KNOW COGNITIVE ABILITY, INTEREST, PERSONALITY AND VALUES ARE OFTEN CONSIDERED IN CAREER CHOICES; WHAT CARRIES MORE WEIGHT?**

Interest (motivation, desire to work in the area) is most important. It doesn't matter how bright or personally suited someone is for a career if the person doesn't want to work in that area, particularly if the person actively does want to work in some other area. After that, cognitive ability is increasingly important the more complex a job is. Greater effort can compensate for lower cognitive ability to some degree, but the more complex the job and the more this is necessary, the more difficult it is going to be to sustain this well over extended periods of time. Personality tends to be rather bound up with motivation and willingness to exert effort and sheer interest, but beyond that, it's a matter of working out ways to cope with the stress that inevitably comes with meeting those job requirements that clash with one's personality. Doing this successfully can result in some of the most satisfying and useful kinds of personal growth.

### **4. AT WHAT STAGE SHOULD A PARENT WORRY ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S CAREER?**

Parents of 'typically developing' (no overt disabilities) should worry when offspring are not accepting the responsibility to become financially self-supporting in some way as they leave school. This can include 'hiding out' in school by taking higher degrees with no clear goal on parents' 'nickel'. They should also worry if offspring are moving into illegal activities, or if they seem to be moving into career-related situations in which they are being abused or taken advantage of. Beyond that, they should let offspring make their own decisions about careers.

## **5. WHAT ROLE DO PARENTS PLAY IN A CHILD'S CAREER?**

That of supportive onlookers, cheerers-on, and sources of advice, but the latter only when asked.

## **6. GIVEN THAT COGNITIVE ABILITY AND PERSONALITY ARE LARGELY HEREDITARY HOW CAN PARENTS HELP THEIR CHILDREN NAVIGATE THEIR CAREER CHOICES ESPECIALLY FOR THE LESS GIFTED CHILDREN?**

Parenting is largely a matter of offering as many varied activities as possible to their children, watching how they respond, and fostering establishment of constructive gene-environment correlations. When children have exposure to many activities, their preferences and progress in those activities reveal their genetic proclivities. Parents can offer relatively more of the activities children enjoy and in which they progress readily and relatively few of those they do not, fostering construction of positive gene-environment correlations that accelerate development in those area. Where children struggle with and avoid activities, parents can infer genetically influences weaknesses. When developing skills at these activities is nonetheless important (such as reading, basic mathematics, managing anger and temper, etc.), parents can get children nonetheless to practice them by explaining why they are important, working to make them more fun for the child, supporting and encouraging an attitude that effort pays off, and, where relevant, helping the child find constructive expression of negative emotion. This can be aided by tutors or extra classes, even camps in many places. The result is a negative gene-environment correlation that minimizes expression of genetic vulnerabilities and/or channels them constructively. As an example of the latter, police and military officers, emergency workers, test pilots, and stunt men/women in films often share dis-inhibited, risk-taking personality characteristics and cognitive skills with criminals, but the former have found ways to express their genetically influenced proclivities in socially valued ways while they latter have not.

## **7. HOW EARLY AND AT WHAT AGE SHOULD CAREER ASSESSMENTS OF CHILDREN BE DONE?**

Very loosely construed, parents observing and reacting to their children's responses to 'smorgasbords' of activities are doing career assessments. This can begin at any age at all, as long as it's done very loosely, allowing children plenty of room to express changing interests, and always supportively. Formal assessments can be helpful when children reach academic milestones requiring selection of educational tracks or formal training programs and the selection precludes other pathways at least for the duration of the selected program. It's not necessary though if the child's preference is clear and parents and teachers have no concerns about the child taking it. I wouldn't recommend formal assessment any earlier than the educational system forces these kinds of choices though. Let children grow as freely as possible, while making sure they are developing pervasively necessary skills such as reading, basic math, constructive social interaction, personal health care, and critical thinking.

## **8. GIVEN THAT JOBS ARE CHANGING SHOULD CAREER GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS POINT CHILDREN TO SPECIFIC CAREERS?**

Only to the extent that education and training programs are specific to careers and needed to practice

them. This shouldn't be necessary until it's no longer appropriate to call them 'children'. Wendy Johnson is an American differential psychologist and professor of Psychology at the University of Edinburgh. She holds the Chair in Differential Development in the Department of Psychology and Centre for Cognitive Ageing and Cognitive Epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh.

## **9. WHAT SHOULD PARENTS DO EARLY TO ENHANCE THE IQ OF THEIR CHILDREN AND SUBSEQUENTLY LIFE OUTCOMES FOR THESE CHILDREN?**

Talk to their children. Listen and respond constructively when their children talk to them. Ask them what they think about things around them and how their days have been and listen and respond to what they say. Offer them choices about activities and let them make decisions about things in their lives, bigger things as they get older. Even very young children can be allowed to decide which of two common foods to have for lunch or which shirt to wear today. When you set behavioral expectations and/or punishments, explain why. Ask them questions and try to answer theirs. Tell them when you don't know either and look it up together however you can. Instill in them a love of exploring the world by reading, to them at first and then together. Let them see you working to figure something out. Offer them as much variety of experience and exposure to different activities and contents as possible. Help them develop the attitude that mastering something new is hard, but can be done with effort and failure in any attempt just means try again a little harder. Help them apply this to school, and to understand that one of the best things they can do for themselves as children, even when it seems stupid, is do well in school.

## **10. CAN PARENT SHAPE THE PERSONALITY OF THEIR CHILDREN?**

Yes, of course. See above re positive and negative gene-environment correlations. Often this means modelling relevant skills oneself, explaining underlying values, and devising ways of offering positive reinforcements for desired behaviors that focus on the child's internal experience rather than material reward, and negative reinforcements for undesired behaviors where the 'punishment clearly fits the crime' (is a clearly logical consequence) and is intended to further learning rather than pain.

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