

Do summer jobs provide lifelong benefits for teens?

12 June 2018, by Sharita Forrest

Fewer teens in the U.S. are spending their summers flipping burgers, mowing grass or performing other types of seasonal jobs than did prior generations, labor experts report. University of Illinois Extension educator Kathy Sweedler, whose focus area is consumer economics, spoke recently with News Bureau education editor Sharita Forrest about what teens can gain from summer jobs.

Pew Research Center recently reported that the number of teens seeking [summer jobs](#) has dwindled from 58 percent in 1978 to fewer than a third in [summer](#) 2017. Are today's teens missing out on valuable skills and developmental experiences if they don't hold summer [jobs](#)?

There is reason to be concerned about that. Many employers have been cited as saying there's a need for employees with [soft skills](#) such as communication skills, teamwork and work ethic. Teens may learn those things the hard way or get opportunities to practice them in summer jobs, where the consequences may not be as great as in a full-time, professional job later in life.

If you have a teen, you might think about where they'll be getting those skills if they're not getting them on the job now.

But perhaps the bigger question is: What are teens doing instead of paid employment? Are they working in unpaid internships that provide skills but not wages? Are they taking courses to prep for college? Or are they helping the family in some way, such as providing [child](#) care for siblings?

If not, could their time be better spent developing these soft skills?

If a teen wants or needs to work this summer, how can parents help them approach their job search thoughtfully?

The parent can help the child think through the kind of job they want and how they need to prepare themselves to get it.

It's important for the child and the parent to discuss their mutual goals. If they're looking for experience that will help the teen decide on a career or a college major, that might take precedence over finding a job that will help pay for college tuition or the child's first car.

Access to transportation is a big issue for many teens, and the family will need to consider what jobs are accessible by bus, walking or biking if the teen doesn't have a car or a family member who can drive them. Then they can look at what jobs fall within that geographic range and which ones can help them meet their goals, and go apply for those particular positions.

When many employers prefer workers with experience, obtaining one's first job can be a real challenge. How might parents boost their child's prospects of getting hired?

Parents may want to work with their teen on filling out job applications, which can be pretty confusing sometimes. There's a natural inclination for youths to skip questions they don't have ready answers to, or they may provide answers that make sense to them – but that might not make sense to an employer or someone with more job experience.

Parents may want to take time to teach their children to complete job applications as thoughtfully and thoroughly as possible. They also might help the child think through the questions that employers might ask during job interviews or decide on the people they could give as personal references. That can be pretty challenging for teens the first time around, too.

What can parents do to instill financial literacy and prepare their teen to handle their own

money?

I'm a firm believer in practice. Money management makes a lot more sense to us when it's our own money. When a teen is starting a summer job, that's a good time to discuss expectations.

At the beginning of the job, the parent and child could talk about what they expect to happen with the money the child makes. Does the parent expect the child to save a certain percentage or spend it on their school clothes – or does the child have free rein to spend their earnings however they please?

It's much easier to have that conversation before the money is earned rather than after it's been spent. The summer will go fast, and the money may go fast, too, if there's not a spending plan in place at the start.

The parent can also help the [teen](#) open up checking and savings accounts. There's some really interesting preliminary research that shows that youths who have money set aside in a savings account that's designated for postsecondary education are more likely to go on to college. It also increases the likelihood that they'll graduate with a college degree or the certification that they're working toward.

And there doesn't have to be a lot of [money](#) in that account in order for that to happen. Just opening up that savings account and starting to save has an effect on teens' educational attainment.

Provided by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

APA citation: Do summer jobs provide lifelong benefits for teens? (2018, June 12) retrieved 21 September 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-06-summer-jobs-lifelong-benefits-teens.html>

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