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Adolescent Studies: Raising Healthy Teenagers

Summer Jobs: Earning Money, Learning Responsibility, Making Contacts

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A structured teen is a disciplined and successful teen. This is according to my latest study which was conducted on 1,000 teenagers and their families over the course of seven years. The participants chosen came from diverse backgrounds in terms of household income, race, and geographic location. Most importantly, the families had a diverse outlook on the importance of summer jobs for their teenage children—ranging from not really caring what their kid did during the summer, to mandating that their child have a job from the moment they are legally eligible to hold one.

The goal of this study was to observe how teenagers with summer work experience compared to those without summer work experience in several crucial fields. These include disciplinary issues at home and school, college acceptance rates, and success in the post-graduation job market.

Over the course of the study we interviewed and surveyed the teenagers and their families to see what was the impact of a summer vacation structured by menial, low income, labor.

Thanks to overwhelmingly conclusive results, we can confidently say that the structure, responsibility, and discipline that summer jobs afford teens impacts them well beyond their wallets. Teens with regular summer jobs were over three times as likely to report a feeling of pride in their accomplishments that they then sought to carry over to experiences outside of the work place.

Many of the participants also reported that they were able to leverage the contacts they made over the course of their summer employment to find better jobs the next summer, or when they entered the full time job market.

What is less clear is the impact of part-time summer employment on the subject's capacity for critical thinking. Many said their experience in the food service or retail industries elucidated the relationship between labor and management, and made them consider alternate ways to structure society. Others reported that they were reassured of their ability to participate in the marketplace, and had a better idea of what to expect from the rest