**The Active Role of Parents in Children’s Career Development**

All parents want the best for their children, but not all parents act the same way to fulfil their wish. Some parents are pushy, trying to be involved in their children’s important decisions while others leave their children on their own and give them a complete freedom to choose what they are interested in. There are many studies that warn pushy parents about the consequences of forcing children to choose a certain career. This develops anxiety, resentment and often insecurity. Counselors, teachers, and other influencers on children consistently remind them that when it comes to selecting their careers, they can be anything they want to be. The decision is theirs and theirs alone.

In this argument I would like to invite parents who are concerned about the future of their children and adolescents but are not sure if they should get involved in their future career decision. As a mother of two kids, I always think about different approaches to help my children grow up in a safe, healthy, and secure family environment and later succeed in their career decision. Growing up in a family of four children with each of us faced a different approach from our parents towards our future academic and career decision, I have a good sense of possible consequences. My husband is also from a family of four children, and I heard from him and his parents how parents’ involvement resulted in their children's career development.

We all agree that a very important aspect of a good career is that you enjoy doing it, not the one that parents think is the best. Everyone has the right to live his/her own life and control his/her own destiny and choosing a career is a major part of this right. Many academic advisors and psychologists say that pushing children towards a certain career can result in development of anxiety and loneliness. We often see children whose parents are less involved directly in their education are more mature, independent, and social. We all have seen and read about people who had a successful career, but they gave up completely to start a job that they have always been interested in. They also often complain that their parents pushed them or even forced them to choose a career that they were never interested in and now they have enough power to eventually do what they have always been interested in.

We all love to see our children successful, happy, and satisfied. As responsible parents we all want to guide and help our children as much as we can. We parents do not want to see our kids suffering from anxiety and loneliness as consequences of pushing them toward a certain career. My older brother started fighting back and disobedience when he felt the pressure from our parents and ended up not going to college. He was a smart and motivated student in high school but the extra pressure from family negated the results! Most parents have either experienced it or heard and are worried about the negative consequences of forcing adolescents to do what we want, not what they are interested in.

Despite all voices supporting children’s independent career decisions, there are studies showing that parents make the strongest impression on their children’s training and career choices.  There are several studies that establish family as a context for adolescent career development. In a longitudinal study among German high school students, adolescents completed questionnaires at two points of measurement which were 6 months apart, child-centered parental behaviors are found correlated positively with information-seeking behaviors about careers. Although the important role of parents has been widely studied, some parents still experience inner conflict between wanting to have influence in their children's lives and, at the same time, not to impose their own values, or to believe that the child is not internally motivated regarding their career direction. This experience of inner conflict may arise when parents believe that they have a degree of influence on their children and feel that the children might put their future in jeopardy if that influence is not used. Moreover, what we hear less about are stories about successful professionals that were directed by their parents just because their story might seem less heroic and exciting as compared to those who followed their own dreams despite parents’ desire.

Parents know their children and have a good perspective of careers that they can succeed in. As a mother of two, I am sure all parents have a dream to see their children in a certain career, even if they do not say it out loud. We parent passionately believe that our children will be remarkably successful in certain careers but often do not know what the best approach is to convey this message to their children without directly forcing them. Most teenagers’ decisions are emotional and transient, and those temporary desires should not affect the rest of their life. If you allow little kids to choose their food and hobbies, they most likely eat ice cream all day and play video games, but is this the best they can do? Should parents allow this purely because they love to do it? There is frequently a conflict between parents and adolescents regarding their different appreciation of short-term actions (e.g., dropping out of school) and the long-term career (what kinds of jobs are available to high school dropouts at age 25). An adolescent may opt for the short-term action while the parent takes a longer view of the implications of the specific short-term action.

I want all parents to know about their key role in their children’s career decision. Although I agree with negative consequences of direct force from parents in their children's career decision, I strongly believe that parents should play a very active strong role by a long-term plan to help their children and indirectly encourage them towards certain professions. I also discuss the differences between negatively involved parents and parents who have positive involvement in their children's decision-making process. Two major components of this argument are: 1. Whether we want it or not, family is a major context for adolescent development and many studies confirmed that children’s decisions are highly influenced by family. 2. Parents often have a better understanding of different careers, know their children, and have a good perspective of careers that they can succeed in based on their talents and interests. Putting these two facts together, one can realize the important role of parents in children’s career decisions. Now, the key question is how parents can effectively participate in this process without facing negative consequences of parental push on their children’s future professional and behavioral life.

There is no question about negative consequences of direct force from parents in their children's career decision. Many studies have shown the anxiety development in children who are forced to choose a certain career. So, direct push not only works but also it most likely will result in negative outcomes. The story of my brother who never went to college only because of my parents’ direct push on him is a live example. What I am suggesting as an alternative is a long-term plan to help children and indirectly encourage them towards certain professions. There are several ways parents can shape and develop their children towards a successful career:

1. Parents should speak out loud about their values at home and admire professions that they hope their children choose in future.

2.  Parents can also speak out loud about negative aspects of the professions that they hope their children do not choose.

3.  Parents should not narrow down to only one or two professions but expose their children to several different careers that are satisfying in their opinion and leave some room for their children’s decision.

4.  Parents should be supportive and in a friendly manner welcome any career ideas coming from their children instead of strongly oppose them if they are not exactly what they want. Once their children feel that parents are supportive, they will trust them better. Then parents can softly present their opinion about their careers.

5. Conflict in conversations about career can arise between parents and adolescents when they are not fully aware of, or are unable to share, the emotional dimensions that occur in interactions between them. We know that parent-child relationships change and become more instrumental and less emotional when children grow to adolescents. But it is likely that conversations about career will be accompanied by emotions on the part of both parties. It is very important that parents be able to monitor their own and each other's feelings as they occur in the interactions.

6.   Not all parents necessarily have a diverse and informed understanding of possible careers. But as mentioned before, the process of helping children is an intentional, long-term plan and every aspect of this plan should be carefully considered. Parents with less diverse knowledge on available careers should remember that they are not alone in the society they are living in. They have friends of different backgrounds. Also, there are so many information resources that are easily accessible through the internet. Places like libraries and other community centers could play an important role in making sure that everyone has access to the resources they need.

7. Concerning the role of peers which was often neglected in career development theory, studies showed that frequent talks with peers about career related issues were significantly associated with the intensity of information-seeking behaviors and, at the same time, predicted an intensification of occupational exploration. Therefore, parents should pay extra attention to friends and classmates and try to choose a school where people share similar opinions.

8.  Alternative plans should be always considered in case the plan did not proceed as expected.

9. Parents should always remain positive and supportive even if their long-term plan does not end in their desired goal.

As a conclusion of this argument, parental care and investment in children are not confined to a single stage in children's lives nor limited to a narrow range of activities. I strongly believe that all parents can and should play an effective role in their children’s career decision. They should consider their kids capabilities, talents and interests and make a path towards a career that meets their values.  It requires a long-term plan and strong involvement and management. Despite all the considerations, the final decision should be made by children, but that does not mean parents should not get involved in the process.

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