Deciding if Teens Should Work

Encouraging teenage family members to find jobs is one way a family can increase its income during tough financial times. Many part-time jobs are available that fit into student schedules.

Pay is usually minimum wage, but can make a significant contribution to the family income and help defray some expenses. Parents and teenagers need to discuss and determine the number of hours that can be worked, how the money will be used, transportation and other issues.

Finding Employment

• Jobs are frequently available for teenagers at restaurants, grocery stores and other retail businesses. Contact the business. Fill out an application which can lead to a job.

• Job Service, newspapers, schools, community bulletin boards, online teen employment site and friends can help direct you to other jobs. Teens can create their own employment by advertising their skills for baby-sitting, mowing lawns, shoveling snow, sweeping sidewalks or washing cars.

• The Federal Workforce Investment Act funds jobs for teenagers as part of summer youth programs and youth-in-school programs. School counselors or principals have information on these programs. Some programs have income eligibility levels.

• Work permits are required for young people under age 16. To secure a work permit, you will need a letter of intent to hire from the prospective employer; you and your parent/guardian take this letter to your school and request Employment Certificate; issuing officer will review safety and check conflicts with your school schedule. Proof of age will be required to obtain a work permit. Take your birth certificate with you.
Evaluating Employment Options

- Researchers, who studied the Depression where family members worked to help their families, found that the work had a positive effect. As adults, they were healthier psychologically and were better off for the work experience.

- Teens that have goals for the use of their earned income do better, according to recent studies.

- Youth who have no clear goals for the use of their earnings spend more on luxuries and develop extravagant spending habits that lead to financial problems in adulthood. Also, these young people are more likely to spend earnings on alcohol and drugs, according to the studies.

- Students who work more than 15 hours per week tend to lose interest in school and their grades drop.

- Developing responsibility, good work skills and self-confidence can be dividends resulting from teen employment.

Managing Income

Here’s a list of ways a teen’s income can be managed. Use the list below to guide a discussion with your teen on how his/her paycheck will be spent:

- Use a portion for routine expenses incurred by the teen such as school lunches, clothes, gifts, dues and recreation. Save the remainder as an education fund.

- Contribute a portion to the family household budget and keep a portion for the teenager’s personal expenses.

- Contribute the entire wages to the family budget and give the teen an allowance.

Teen Contributions to Family Budget

An ideal way for the teen to become familiar with the expenses of the whole family is to assist with developing the family budget. Have your teen figure the family budget without any of his/her earnings included. Then, add in a portion of the additional earnings under “income” and adjust “selected expense” categories, particularly in areas where the teen normally has expenses. You could also have your teen figure the budget including his/her total earnings. Such a comparison will help the teen and the rest of the family see the impact of his/her contributions to the total family budget.

When teenagers are highly involved in family money management, it’s easier for them to understand the family financial situation and why they can’t have some of the extras their friends may have. The hands-on involvement is a good tool to help teens develop their ability to set goals, make choices and see the value of the family working together.