

## Parental engagement in careers activity: conversation starter questions

### Background

Parents, carers and guardians play an important part in career and education choices of young people. The Gatsby Foundation is undertaking a programme of research and piloting in order to find out how to support schools and colleges, to help parents\* have these discussions with their children. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Gatsby and the Careers and Enterprise Company have worked together with Careers Leaders to explore ideas and good practice in working with parents in these challenging times. This guidance is part of a **suite of resources** developed swiftly in autumn 2021, to share what practitioners say is working in schools and colleges right now.

*\*The word 'parent' is used to refer to parents, carers and guardians*

### Activity outline

To complement your existing parental engagement work through parents' evenings and calls home, dedicated activities can build the relationship between your careers team and parents, and between parents and their children on this topic.



This **conversation starter activity** can be run informally to help parents and students discuss skills and careers options with support from school or college. Parents and children are encouraged to ask each other questions to help them feel confident initiating conversations at home around careers and next steps.

It can be delivered directly to parents during a family event, either virtually or in school or college, but it can also be adapted for use with students or signposted for families to try at home. All the question prompts are included on the next page and could be shared virtually or printed out.

### Objectives

- Help parents and students **openly discuss interests, skills and careers options**
- Help parents **share and reflect on their experience** and feel confident that their input can be of value to their child
- Help parents support their child in understanding their abilities and skills, how to develop themselves and their self-belief

### How to run the activity

#### - During a family event (in school/college or online)

Families are split into groups (or virtual breakout rooms) and asked to pick a conversation starter prompt to discuss. The questions build in depth and difficulty encouraging families to delve into topics in more detail as they go on and take their conversations further. More of a game element can be introduced with families being randomly allocated questions and being asked to compare with other families which were the most difficult to answer and why.

The activity can be adapted depending on the audience e.g. for families that need more support, the facilitator can pick questions and read them out loud, explaining what they mean. For families able to work independently, they can individually pick questions and discuss.

- **In PSHE, form time or careers session (in school/college or online)**

Teachers can share the sentences like the ones below as examples of careers conversations students could have with their parents, and get them to explore in groups the challenges they could face when having careers conversations at home and what they would do to overcome them:

- *We have all been to university in the family, you should go as well*
- *You should study maths or science instead of arts*

Next, they can be encouraged to pick some conversation starter prompts from the list and discuss how they would answer them if they were doing the activity with their parents. As a follow up task, they can try the prompts at home with their parents and share in the next session how they got on.

- **At home**

The conversation starter prompts could be shared with parents via your newsletter or careers site and families encouraged to try them at home together. You could do a whole school or college challenge with one question being set a week for families to discuss.

## Questions

### Theme: skills and interests

Questions for students to ask parents

1. What were you good at in school?
2. What do you enjoy doing most at home, work, with friends or family?
3. What do you think your talents are / you are good at?

Questions for parents to ask students

1. What do you enjoy most in and out of school/college?
2. What do you feel you are good at in school/college?
3. What is your favourite subject? Do you know what kind of jobs are related to these subjects?
4. Which of your interests, skills and abilities do you think will help you most in your future career?

### Theme: learning about careers

Questions for students to ask parents

1. How did you learn about careers when you were at school?
2. Do you think there are more/different career options available now?
3. Do you know anyone who's completed an apprenticeship? What did they tell you about it?
4. Do you know anyone who's been to university? What did they tell you about it?
5. Do you know anyone who went straight into a job after school or college? What was that like for them?

Questions for parents to ask students

1. What takes place in school/college to help you with your future?
2. Who can help you at school/college with questions about careers? Is there a Careers Leader, Careers Advisor or Head of Careers?
3. Do you hear from employers in school? Which ones did you like? What inspired you?
4. Do ex pupils / students come back into school to talk about their post-education experience? Did some of their experiences inspire you?

5. How much do you know about Further Education and employment options including apprenticeships, traineeships and T-levels? Do you know where to find out more about these routes?
6. Is there anything you're unsure of that you've been introduced to but need more information about?

**Theme: making choices**

Questions for both students and parents

1. What did you want to be when you were 10 years old?
2. If money wasn't a factor what would be your dream job?
3. What are the top five things that you think are important when choosing a job or career?

Questions for students to ask parents

1. How did you choose the path you've taken?
2. What advice would you give me about making choices?

Questions for parents to ask students

1. What do you think of jobs that involve travel? Do you want a job that will give you the opportunity to travel, or would you prefer to stay near home?
2. What sort of environment would you like to work in? An office / in a big team / independently / outside?
3. My path has included (education, apprenticeship, university, work, homemaking etc). What would you like your future to include?
4. What challenges do you need to overcome to get to your preferred option?
5. What support do you need from me to help you research your options and make decisions?
6. What do you think my job entails? What do I do day to day? What do you think are the main tasks?

**Further resources**

You can find other resources about engaging parents in careers guidance on the [CEC Resource Directory](#), such as the Conversation starter resource and the Communications tips.