

Parents Are the Foundation

Teens & WORK

January 2008

Many high school students hold jobs before and after school, on weekends and during school vacations. Having a job can provide both positive opportunities and challenging consequences for teens.

Teens that work may be more responsible, have higher self-esteem and independence. However, the beginning jobs that teens hold may be routine, boring and lack positive interaction with adults.

The Downside of Teen Work

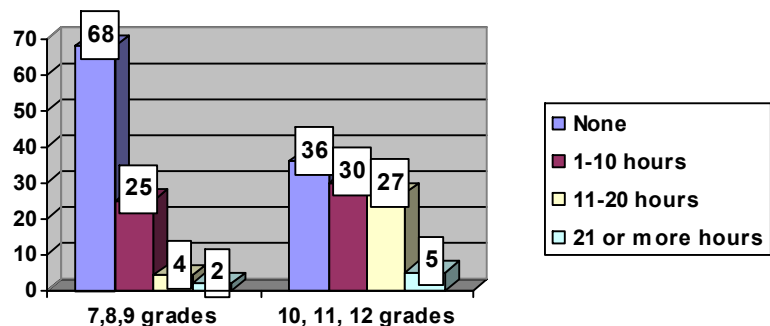
Teens often work in businesses like fast food outlets, grocery stores, and restaurants. They often earn minimum wage and may work long hours. When teens work long hours, it can lead to poor school performance, increased drug use and problems with the law.

Several studies have found that teens who work more than 20 hours per week are more likely to experience negative effects in their school, family and personal lives. Adolescents who work 20 or more hours report higher levels of emotional distress and substance abuse as well as fatigue, sleep deprivation, and less exercise.

Teens who work long hours spend less time on homework resulting in poorer school performance. If teens spend their time working, they also have less time for volunteering or family events and are less likely to be involved in school activities.

In the 2005 Search Survey of Student Resources and Assets, 32% of Iowa County 10th, 11th and 12th graders report that they work more than 10 hours per week. In addition, 27% of all Iowa County teens work 1-10 hours per week. The chart illustrates the responses to the question, "During an average week, how many hours do you work in a paid job?"

HOURS PER WEEK IN A PAID JOB



Benefits of Work

While there can be negative aspects of teens working, there are also some positive benefits. Research shows that teens who work developed increased social skills. There might also be increases in punctuality, feeling of competence, dependability and personal responsibility among working teenagers.

Working teens also learn life skills in managing time and money, carrying out instructions, getting along with co-workers and adapting to workplace routines. However, these positives are overshadowed by negative effects when teens work more than 20 hours per week.

Youth who work limited hours while in high school are more likely to be employed after high school than teens who do not work. Teens with some work experience also have a better chance of earning higher wages after graduation and may establish contacts with adult employers who can give positive recommendations in the future.

Teen Employment and Injuries

Children and teenagers are injured on the job at a rate of almost twice that of adults. What factors account for this high injury rate?

✓ Youth workers may not receive adequate training to perform the tasks expected of them.

✓ Youth workers may not have adequate adult supervision.

✓ Youth are inexperienced compared to adults.

✓ Youth are still developing physically, mentally, and intellectually and may not have the skills or abilities to handle unexpected work problems.

Learning about Work at School

Teens do have opportunities in school to learn skills they need to be successful at work and to learn about jobs and work.

In the 2005 Search Survey of Student Resources and Assets, 69% of Iowa County 7th through 12th graders strongly agree or agree that the skills they are learning in school (such as math, reading, writing, science) are preparing them for a future job.

Many high school students also take advantage of opportunities to job shadow someone working in a career they are interested in. In the Search Survey, 85% of the Iowa County 7th-12th graders reported they have “watched or helped someone do their job to learn about it and what they do.” Experiences like job shadows benefit teens by exposing them to people working in careers the teens are interested in and giving the teens a chance to see what it is really like to work in that job.

Iowa County parents also help students learn about jobs and careers. Over 75% of the teens in the Search survey reported that they “have talked with their parents about the role education will play in having a job or career I want.”

Iowa County parents can make a difference in the success their teens have working while in high school. To work or not to work—it is a decision parents can help their teen consider.

Talking to your teen about work

Parents can play an important role in helping their teens select challenging and safe jobs and experience positive benefits of working.

Ö Talk with your teen about why they want to get a job.

Ö Discuss how a job will affect school activities, homework, and responsibilities at home. Establish standards that your teen should meet in order to keep working.

Ö Discuss job possibilities with your teen. Think about opportunities for promotion, how to learn valuable skills that relate to the teen's future goals, and the safety of the working environment.

Ö Work with your teen to set up a plan for the money earned. Invest a certain percentage for future education and decide what percent the teen can use as he or she wants.

Ö Monitor the number of hours your teen works. If their shift ends at 7 pm, find out where they will be after 7 pm, whom they will be with and what they will be doing.

Ö Track how your teen is doing in school. School performance is too important to be sacrificed for work.

PARENTS ARE THE FOUNDATION !

“Parents are the Foundation” is a monthly, school-year newsletter containing information from the 2005 Survey of Student Resources and Assets in Iowa County Schools by America's Promise and the Search Institute and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Iowa County. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension Teen Assessment Project “Whose Kids?...Our Kids!” newsletter series. This issue was written by Deb Ivey and edited by Ruth Schriefer and Sarah Weier. Thanks are extended to the 1,264 7th to 12th graders in Highland, Mineral Point, Pecatonica and River Valley who participated in the survey. For more information, contact us at UW-Extension Iowa County, 608-935-0391 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/iowa/>