
WITHIN REACH

Self-Assessment

As you know—and your children will soon learn—you have to know yourself to know the right career for you. If you don't, you may be very dissatisfied with how you spend most of your waking hours, which is at work.

You'll find the most job satisfaction if your work and job setting match your interests and goals.

Identifying Interests

To find an occupation or field of study in which your children will be happy, productive and successful, you should together identify and discuss their interests in work, personal values and leisure activities. The methods change as your children mature.

1. Start Casually

To begin helping your children identify their interests and preferences, discuss their:

- favorite and least favorite school subjects
- favorite activities and hobbies
- personal interests and goals
- favorite types of work (e.g., working outdoors, working with his/ her hands or using a computer)

Share your favorites as well. That turns the self-assessment process into a conversation rather than a test or interrogation! It can make your children feel more comfortable opening up.

2. Move onto Informal Assessments

As your children reach middle school, have them take some informal interest inventories, such as the one below. You might also try searching online for free tools, such as the [Interest Profiler](https://www.nextstepsidaho.gov/interest-profiler) tool at [NextSteps.Idaho.gov/interest-profiler](https://www.nextstepsidaho.gov/interest-profiler).

Instant Interest Inventory

Have your children answer the following questions to get a clearer sense of the **type** of work that interests them.

Do you like:

- building things?
- fixing things?
- helping people?
- being outdoors?
- selling things?
- solving problems?
- being creative?
- speaking in front of people?
- initiating projects yourself?
- working alone or with others?
- following the same daily routine?

The goal of these assessments is to tease out information that will help your children choose an educational and eventual career path. Make no judgments or criticisms.

3. Arrange for Formal Career Assessments

Encourage your children to take formal interest inventories and assessments. These career assessments often examine interest, personality, and work values.

It's not hard to find these tests for your children. Their guidance counselors have access to many different tools and know how to help your children go through this process and understand the results. Many community colleges also administer them for a small fee. If you type in "career assessment" into any Internet search engine you will see hundreds of options; many at no added cost. Since many of these assessments can only be administered in group settings, check with your counselor to see which tests the school administers and ask to receive an interpretation of the assessment results.

Career assessments have improved considerably in recent years. Still, always remember that they can point you in the right direction but they can't make decisions for you. When your children take career assessments, remind them that there are no wrong or right answers. The results serve only to help your children investigate occupational and training options, not to force them to "pick a career."

The information gathered in the inventories can help them start comparing interests with actual careers to assess how well they match. They might start with a school subject that they enjoy and search for related careers. An interest in math, for example, would result in occupations ranging from cashier to engineer.

You can also explore careers using specific types of work activity and conditions that your children enjoy. If your children enjoy public speaking, what kinds of occupations allow or require that? Teachers, trainers, coaches and scientists leap to mind and there are many more. Again, tools such as *Idaho Next Steps* can help make the connection.

As your children learn more about different occupations, take different subjects in school, gain experience through job shadowing or mentorships or expand horizons through part-time jobs, they may find certain jobs or training options more appealing. Some of these experiences will coincide with assessment results and others may be different. That's normal!

Learning what they enjoy can help children appreciate that work isn't just "putting in time" to get money; it's about providing a service. Still, money— and the lifestyle it affords—is important and can help children focus on the types of careers they want. The Plan Smart calculator at *Next Steps Idaho* is especially helpful for connecting educational and lifestyle desires (nextsteps.idaho.gov/plan-smart).