



Career Choices a

TEENAGERS AND YOUNG ADULTS with ADD or ADHD have a wide range of intellectual abilities and interests, and may therefore pursue a wide variety of vocations. There are adults with attention deficits in traditional careers such as medicine or law, as well as those with jobs that tap their creative and physical abilities, such as art, modeling, electronics, music, computers, or working on cars. Others find that college is not for them and that learning a trade such as carpenter, chef, plumber, hair stylist, car mechanic, or heating and air conditioner repairman has greater appeal. Finding a job that can hold their interest and commitment for a long time is critically important. Many prefer jobs that are active, include changes in routine, and involve a variety of different issues or people throughout the work week.

Selecting the right career is crucial and will require more planning for students who have attention deficits. The career your teenager or young adult selects should maximize his or her strengths and minimize deficits such as poor organizational skills or lack of attention to detail.

Please keep in mind that some extremely bright teenagers with attention deficits excel academically in both high school and college. They may be skilled at many things and have trouble narrowing their job options. And then again, they may have trouble staying focused long enough to make a career decision.

Identify skills and interests

Identifying your teenager's skills and interests should be helpful in finding a good career match for him or her. You and your teenager can begin talking informally about these issues in high school.

- What does he/she enjoy doing?
- What special skills does he/she have?
- What vocations match his/her strengths and interests?

- What does she do with his/her spare time?
- Is he/she outgoing and does she enjoy talking a lot? Work in sales might be a perfect choice.

Listed below are several steps you and your teenager can take to help find the most appropriate career.

Vocational testing

Vocational interest testing can be conducted in high school, a technical institute, or college to help identify a student's strengths and career interests. In college or technical school, the student services section can help schedule the testing; in high school, the guidance counselor can. This testing is usually free.

The *Strong Interest Inventory* is one vocational test that some colleges use. Students answer questions about things they like or dislike. The scores give them a pattern of interests and show how their interests compare with those of successful people in different occupations. Scores are obtained for six general occupational themes:

1. Realistic;
2. Investigative;
3. Artistic;
4. Social;
5. Enterprising; and
6. Conventional.

Approximately one hundred fifteen possible occupations are listed within these themes. Learn more about the *Strong Interest Inventory* at cpp.com.

Computerized career programs

Interactive computer programs are available that explain details regarding various careers. For example, Educational Testing Services developed SIGI PLUS, which describes detailed aspects of numerous occupations: work activities, settings, educational requirements, average income, top earning potential, average work week, and employment outlook. This computer software or simulator programs are available on most college campuses. Talk with staff in the counseling and career planning office at your college or visit valparint.com for more information.

Personality testing

Another test that may be helpful is the *Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory*. The teenager answers approximately one hundred questions about herself and the way she conducts her daily life. Based upon her scores, one of sixteen personality styles that describes her will be identified. This test provides labels for differences in personality that

FOR MORE INFO

Learn more about the **Strong Interest Inventory and the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory** at cpp.com.

Learn more about SIGI PLUS, developed by Educational Testing Services, at valparint.com.

If you search for these tests on the Internet, you will find many providers who provide online testing at low cost. When you choose a provider, be sure that you will be receiving an in-depth report explaining the results. A free opportunity to take the tests is worthless without the explanation of the results. And as always, buyer beware.

See Chris Zeigler Dendy's related article on summer jobs in this issue.



Chris A. Zeigler Dendy, MS, has over forty years combined experience in a variety of professional roles, including teacher, school psychologist, mental health counselor, administrator, lobbyist, advocate, author, and publisher. She is the mother of three grown children and grandmother of three, all with attention deficit disorders. She has served on CHADD's board of directors, executive committee, and President's Council and was inducted into the CHADD Hall of Fame in 2006. Among her books are *Teaching Teens with ADD, ADHD, and Executive Function Deficits: A Quick Reference Guide for Teachers and Parents* (Woodbine, second edition forthcoming May 2011) and *Teenagers with ADD and ADHD: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* (Woodbine, 2006). She coproduced the DVD *Real Life ADHD: A Survival Guide for Children & Teens*, featuring thirty teens speaking from their own experiences.



and ADHD

we observe in work colleagues and family on a day-to-day basis.

This is an interesting exercise that may help these teens gain insight into their personality, how they think, make decisions, and live. The more she understands about herself and how she relates to others, the more she may learn to get along better with people and be more productive at work. One teenager with ADHD who took the test was astounded that the test described him so well. Many young adults are curious about who they are and what makes them tick. This test takes advantage of their natural curiosity. Learn more about the *Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory* at cpg.com.

Opposite extremes of four basic categories are identified on the Myers-Briggs:

1. Energy preferences: *Extrovert—Introvert*;
2. Perceptual preferences: *Sensing (realistic)—Intuitive*;
3. Decision-making preferences: *Thinking (Objective)—Feeling*;
4. Lifestyle preference: *Judging (goal directed)—Perceiving (flexible/spontaneous)*.

Some teenagers with ADHD may be described as an Extrovert, Intuitive, Feeling, and Perceiving (spontaneous). Certain personality types are better suited to particular careers. For example, as noted in the Strong Inventory, the teenager who had an attention deficit probably would not make a good accountant because he or she would have to pay attention to details, be objective, deal with routine, and finish up quickly. This information may also explain why people with different personality types have problems in relationships. Obviously, conflicts may result between a teenager and his or her parents if they have the opposite characteristics of introverted, Sensing (realistic), Thinking (objective), and Judging (goal-directed).

According to Kathleen Nadeau, PhD, author of several books on ADHD, those of our teens who are described as “perceiving” tend to be mood-driven with regard to their work. They do their best work when they are in the mood to work. So sometimes you have to be flexible and let them work on their own timetable, even though it may not match yours. For example, she may not divide a project up into nice equal segments. She may skip two nights and then work until midnight finishing up an assignment.

NOTE TO READERS

While this article is addressed to parents of teenagers and young adults, much of its advice on making career choices is equally applicable to adults with ADHD, as are its recommendations of assessment tools.



Special courses

Teenagers can continue to explore job options in college through career study and personal development classes. Students don't have to declare a major upon entering college. During the first two years, most students take basic academic requirements anyway, such as algebra, English, and history. Some college courses offer an opportunity to explore career options and to make decisions about a college major. The curriculum may include vocational testing, career discussions, filling out job applications, strategies for job interviews, and writing resumes and letters for job interviews.

Some colleges also offer psychology courses related to interpersonal relationships and personal growth and development. A course of this nature should be helpful to a teenager with an attention deficit. Typically, the classes are more interactive and require less written homework. Class participation is the key variable in the student's grade. If the student attends class every day and actively participates, she should receive a good grade. An A or B added to her grade point average would be a nice bonus.

Meeting professionals in the field

Another way to find out more about various careers is to talk with professionals currently working in the field. If your teenager expresses interest in such a meeting, you might line up informal interviews through your personal and professional contacts. 📍

Adapted from Teenagers with ADD and ADHD: A Guide for Parents and Professionals (Woodbine, 2006) with permission of the author, Chris A. Zeigler Dendy, MS.