

\_ADULTHOOD \_BEHAVIOR AND LIFE SKILLS

# The Problem with Teens No Longer Working Part-Time Jobs

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How many jobs did you have growing up? I started babysitting neighborhood kids at age 11 (which sounds so incredibly young now that I'm a mother), and I continued to babysit for many years through the summer after my freshman year of college. I also

worked in the snack bar at the local swim club for several summers and at a book store during my senior year of high school.

Have you noticed that nowadays teenagers rarely have jobs? Recently, I was shocked to find out that a few of the high school students in my community had absolutely no interest or time to babysit my kids on an occasional Saturday night. Their mothers gave excuses like they were too busy with sports tournaments and studying.

The reluctance of teens holding part-time or summer jobs is now a national trend that has caused a fair amount of concern from experts in the marketplace. Why is it happening and how does it impact a child's future in the long run? According to Pew Research, in the 1970s and 80s, most teens worked at least part of their summer vacation, but the share of teens working summer jobs has decreased since the early 1990s. Now only about 20 percent of teens hold a job, which is an all-time low since the United States started keeping track in 1948.

Three main reasons can be linked to this trend: job market changes, education, and college resume-building priorities mainly pushed by parents. First, a shift in the job market has made it more difficult for teens to find part-time jobs. An article in Bloomberg explains that when the recessions hit in the early 1990s, early 2000s, and from 2007 to 2009, teen labor rates fell dramatically. As the economy recovered, teen labor never bounced back. Also, employers are less willing to hire teens because there is more competition with older Americans staying in the workforce and new Americans moving to the country looking for work.

Next, education has become the priority for most teens in the past several decades, so getting a part-time job isn't even on their radar. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows how millions of teenagers aren't working because they're studying instead. Education is taking up more time as school districts have extended both the school day and the academic year, increased the homework load, and put pressure on students to attend summer classes.

Most students aren't going to summer school because they failed a class; they are going purely for enrichment to get ahead and look impressive to colleges. The percent of 16- to 19-year-olds enrolled in summer school has tripled in the last 20 years. Also, kids are taking harder classes overall. According to Bloomberg, calculus is up threefold since the early 1980s, while precalculus is up more than fivefold, and statistics has increased by tenfold. The number of students taking advanced placement (AP) classes has also been steadily rising.

Finally, many teenagers are choosing not to get jobs because they want to focus on other activities that they think will impress college admissions officers, such as sports, music, student council, volunteering, and other extra-curricular activities.

Millions of children in the United States feel overwhelmed and pressured because of their over-scheduled lives. Parents feel like they aren't doing a good job if they don't sign their children up for a laundry list of activities. But these kids end up feeling like they are under so much pressure that they don't even have time to babysit once in a while or have a fun summer job that can actually teach them more about life than any book, class, or organized activity ever will.

Many students now enter college without ever holding a part-time job in high school, and this can have a big impact on their future success. I recently watched a hilarious video spoofing a millennial job interview. The candidate had no clue what it meant to get to work on time, respect a supervisor, or actually get any real work done besides scrolling through social media. She was the stereotypical millennial who had been coddled her whole life and expected the world to revolve around her. As you can imagine, she did not get the job.

If our kids never spend time working at a real job, how will they ever understand what it means to succeed at work someday when they graduate from college or graduate school with all of their hard-earned degrees? They still need to have some basic life skills that can only be learned in the field, such as:

- Time management

- Self-discipline
- Follow company rules
- Take on and understand responsibilities
- Learn to collaborate with a diverse group of people
- Creative problem-solving
- Conflict resolution
- Respect colleagues at all levels
- Overcome challenges and failures
- Able to deal with difficult clients and co-workers
- Accept criticism

Working part-time while going to school also helps teens grow in so many ways. First, jobs help teens experience something new, expanding their perspective beyond school and home by interacting with different people, learning new information, hearing stories from co-workers and customers, and seeing how the world operates outside of their comfort zone.

Next, they mature more quickly and are able to take on more responsibility. They learn about responsibility such as not being able to check Instagram and Snapchat because they need to focus on a cash register, stocking shelves, or helping customers.

Jobs also teach teens how to manage money. Teens who earn their own money have more of an appreciation of its value and tend to be more responsible with their purchases.

Teens can also get a self-esteem boost from working, as they achieve goals and get rewarded for their hard work. This will also make them begin to feel more independent and self-reliant.

Finally, one of the most important benefits of a teen job is that it teaches them how to multi-task and manage their time. It is critical for all individuals' life-long health and happiness to know how to find balance in their lives. By managing homework, extra-

curricular activities, social and family commitments, *and* a job, teens will learn how to do this with success.

## **What parents can do**

A huge part of this teen job problem is us – or potentially us in a few years if you have young kids now. Parents are not letting their kids grow up. Instead, we're coddling them because of guilt, fear, and other issues we're holding onto. This is hurting a whole generation of kids who are staying kids for way too long. It's really up to us to shift the story by taking the following actions once you have a teenager in the house:

**Start slow.** Help your teen figure out a small job that she can do during the summer at first. If she attends camp, see if she can start as a camp counselor-in-training. Or maybe she can attend an educational program for half of the summer and do some babysitting during the rest of the break.

**Help your teen learn how to find a job.** Without doing all the work for him, guide him on how to write a resume, how to email local companies about part-time jobs, how to network with friends and neighbors about opportunities, etc.

I have a neighbor whose son is particularly successful at math, so he created a flyer highlighting his tutoring services and placed them in mailboxes around our community. He landed one great client and was thrilled to make some extra money while helping a younger child at his school excel in math.

**Identify what they love.** As they get older and have more experiences, work with them to find out what their strengths and passions are so they can find a job that they will be excited about.

**Prepare your teen for job interviews.** Get books out of the library, watch interview tips videos, and do mock interviews with her to help her prepare.

**Teach them professionalism.** Talk to them about professional issues, such as appropriate dress, how to interact with bosses and co-workers, reporting to work on time, cell phone use, etc.

**Be a listener.** Always be available to your child by providing encouragement and to be a sounding board in case he faces difficult or challenging situations at his job.



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