

Talking to Your Child About Post-16 Options – Top Tips for Parents/Carers

Choosing what to do after age 16 can feel overwhelming for young people. Parents play a key role in offering calm guidance, encouragement, and practical support. Here are some helpful tips to make those conversations positive and productive.

1. Start Early and Keep It Low-Pressure

- Bring up the topic gradually rather than in one big serious conversation.
 - Make it clear that they don't need to have all the answers right away.
 - Encourage exploration rather than decisions.
-

2. Focus on Their Interests and Strengths

- Ask what they enjoy at school and outside of it.
 - Notice their natural abilities—are they practical, academic, creative, hands-on, social?
 - Let their skills guide the direction rather than what friends are doing or what you might prefer.
-

3. Explore All the Options Together

Help them understand the full range of routes available in the UK, such as:

- **A-levels**
- **T Levels**
- **Vocational courses / BTECs**
- **Apprenticeships**
- **Traineeships / study programmes**
- **Employment with training**

Look at college websites, apprenticeship platforms, or open day information together.

4. Use Open, Non-Judgemental Questions

Try:

- “What are you most curious to learn more about?”
 - “What kind of environment do you feel you thrive in?”
- Avoid yes/no questions or pushing your own preferred option.

5. Attend Open Days and Events

- Visit sixth forms, colleges, and training providers.
 - Let your child lead the conversations while you listen.
 - Encourage them to speak to current students or teachers.
-

6. Be Realistic but Encouraging

- Talk about entry requirements, workload, and career pathways honestly.
 - Support them in understanding what's achievable *without shutting down* options too early.
 - Remind them that changing direction later is possible.
-

7. Talk About the Future in a Positive Way

- Discuss long-term interests, types of work environments, and lifestyle preferences.
 - Explain that post-16 choices are stepping stones, not lifelong commitments.
-

8. Encourage Independence

- Let your child research courses, fill in their applications, and make initial enquiries.
 - Stay available for support, but avoid taking over the process.
-

9. Reassure Them That Feeling Unsure Is Normal

- Many young people don't know what they want to do at 15–16.
 - Emphasise trying things, learning, and staying open-minded.
-

10. Celebrate Their Effort, Not Just Their Choice

- Recognise the thought and work they put into exploring options.
- Help them feel confident and empowered in whichever route they choose.