



Should Teens Get a Job?!

Weighing the benefits of part-time jobs for teens.

by Lisa Grant

Ashley Olichwier didn't want to work. At age 15, she had other ideas about how to spend her free time, but her mother insisted that she find a part-time job. Olichwier, now 17 and a senior at Holmen High School, is glad to be working and saving money for college. "I like the people I work with," she says. "I also like getting paid."

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, more than 80 percent of teens report working a part-time job during the high school years. As the competition for coveted college admissions heats up, young people are finding it more difficult to strike a healthy balance between school, work, family, and friends.

The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (NRC/IOM) released a report in November 1998 on the implications of teens in the workforce, which found evidence that work has both positive and negative effects for teenagers. The research showed teen workers gain valuable assets such as responsibility, punctuality, learning to deal with people, and money management skills.

According to the report, a part-time job may also develop career interests. Marine Credit Union in La Crosse works with youth in a two-year apprenticeship program at Logan High School. Kim Butler, branch supervisor, says, "This program is phenomenal."

How can you protect your teen?

Here are some tips from the Child Labor Coalition's website for ensuring your teen's work experience is a good one:

Set limits. The National Consumers League (NCL) recommends the following work hour limitations:

- **Under age 14** – No work; focus on school, families, and other activities.
- **14 and 15 year olds** – During summer, no more than 6 hours a day, 30 hours per week. During school year, no more than 3 hours per day, 15 hours per week. No hours before 7 a.m. or after 7 p.m.
- **16 and 17 year olds** – During summer, no more than 8 hours a day, 40 hours per week. During school year, no more than 4 hours per day, 20 hours per week. No hours before 7 a.m. or after 10 p.m.

Monitor the worksite. The NCL strongly recommends teens not work alone or without adult supervision. Ask frequently about the job and safety training, and know/view the equipment your teen will operate. Visit your child's place of employment periodically.

Watch for warning signs. If your teen is always tired, loses interest in school, or no longer has time for family and friends, s/he is working too much, even if those hours fall into the guidelines. If your child is injured on the job or displays a change in attitude toward the job (feels reluctant to go, anxious, or stressed), it's time for you to step in.

If you have concerns about an employer, contact the Wisconsin Department of Labor at (608) 266-6860 for information specific to youth employment.

Juniors and seniors are hired by the credit union and paid for the hours they work. Participants work about 10 hours a week and simultaneously earn school credits. "A big benefit is the students can be involved in school activities and have their evenings free for school work," says Butler. Youth apprenticeship students also have the opportunity to remain employed once they complete the program. According to Butler, all former participants have stayed and are currently attending college and working part-time.

Too many work hours is the key culprit in spoiling the value of a work experience. Students who work long hours risk not getting sufficient sleep and exercise, and may not advance as far in school, according to the NRC/IOM report. On the other hand, a 2001 article in the "Journal of Educational Research" found 12 hours or less per week actually improved grades.

Other studies show teens who work part time during high school are more



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likely to attend college, but again, limited hours is key. Virginia Tech research showed students who worked 15 or more hours a week while in school had a decline in grades and scored lower on standardized tests. These students were also less likely to take demanding courses, particularly higher level math and science courses.

As a result, parents may decide working is not an option for their children and encourage extracurricular activities instead. A job for a student with greater academic needs or a child who may be prone to burnout may do more harm than good.

Some parents simply want their kids to have an easier childhood than they had, so their teens are not required to work. These parents may also choose to pay for their child's social activities and other luxuries, but that doesn't sit well with working students. "When I see parents who pay for anything, it makes me a little angry. It makes me mad that

I have to work for everything when they don't," says Olichwier. "But I guess it could make me more responsible in the long run."

Other parents see a job as a rite of passage into adulthood. Amy Baxley of Onalaska, mother of a teenage daughter,

"I guess it could make me more responsible in the long run."

Ashley Olichwier, working teen


says having a part-time job helps ease kids into the many responsibilities of adulthood. "I believe this comes as quite a shock for some young adults who have never had to do this," says Baxley.

Baxley bases her position on her own experience as a teen. "My parents did not require it (a job) or even suggest it," she says. "My needs were solely met by my parents. I realize I took that for granted and therefore had very little work ethic or knowledge of the value of the dollar."

After becoming a mother at age 18, she began working and eventually attended college. "By the grace of God, I adapted to these new responsibilities, but I have chosen to have my child a little more prepared," Baxley says.

Ultimately, parents must decide what is right for their children based on individual needs and opportunities. If working provides an overall benefit, including a proper balance in school, family, and friends, it will have a positive lasting effect beyond the high school years. **CPC**

Lisa Grant is a freelance writer who lives in Holmen with her husband and children, one of whom is a working teen.




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Calories	Cal	190
Protein	Pro	10g
Fat	Fat	12g
Carbs	Carb	11g
Sodium	Sodium	400mg

Nutrition for McDonald's Chicken McNuggets (4-piece)¹



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References:

1. McDonald's: www.mcdonalds.com, accessed September 2008

2. USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release #20, 2007, www.ars.usda.gov/ba/bhnrc/ndb

* 2 slices bread, 2 oz ham, 1 tsp mayonnaise

† hot dog on bun with mustard

‡ cheese pizza (5 oz)

	4 pc. Chicken McNugget ¹	Ham Sandwich ²	Grilled Cheese Sandwich ²	Hot Dog ^{3†}	Pizza (2 slices) [‡]
Calories	190	244	269	239	391
Fat	10g	9g	13g	16g	18g