**Should Teens Work Part Time While in School?**

**DEC 17, 2018 BY**[**CARRIE WHITNEY, PH.D.**](https://www.howstuffworks.com/hsw-contact.htm)

From bagging groceries to making smoothies, that first job a teenager has can provide him or her with a sense of independence, not to mention extra cash to spend on important teenage things like fast food, cool sneakers and [Fortnite](https://electronics.howstuffworks.com/fortnite-quiz.htm) skins. But finding — and holding — a job can also teach teens tons of skills, and help them develop positive work habits early in life.

Having a part-time job during high school might sound like a no-brainer, but parents of teens need to weigh the benefits against the potential pitfalls (like time away from schoolwork and extracurricular activities) to determine whether working is a good choice. And set boundaries so the teen's focus stays on their studies.

**Growing in Income and Maturity**

Working as a teenager has the obvious benefit of earning money to spend and save. But more than a simple influx of cash, working allows teens to appreciate the value of money and what it means to earn a dollar. Working teens learn an important financial lesson about how much people really earn per hour, says Nashica McRath, a financial adviser with [Edward Jones](https://www.edwardjones.com/). Putting that into perspective, along with understanding how to pay taxes and contribute to [Social Security](https://money.howstuffworks.com/personal-finance/personal-income-taxes/social-security-taxes.htm) are lessons in maturity and "how to navigate the world of becoming an adult," she says.

Whether a high school student continues onto higher education or moves straight into the working world, holding a job during high school can prime them with real-life financial awareness and the ability to budget and manage money.

"Work experience allows [teens] to learn time management and practical job skills that can only help them in their daily lives when they go to college and after college," says Brenda M. Brown, director of business development, [College Aid Services, LLC](https://www.collegeaidservices.net/).

Dr. Ciara Smalls Glover, associate professor at [Georgia State University](https://www.gsu.edu/), agrees and says in addition to practical matters, teens with jobs might discover new interests and talents, possibly leading to a future career path. Glover researches family-youth processes and culturally distinctive experiences that contribute to positive development.

"Typically, we expect adolescents to make decisions about their future careers when they get to college and select a major," she says. "That can be a daunting task for some. Work or volunteer experiences can provide opportunities for students to better understand themselves."

**Juggling It All**

Increased cash flow and financial maturity aside, having a part-time job during high school also means time away from studies and extracurricular activities. If a teen doesn't know how to prioritize, something is going to suffer, McRath explains.

Holding all of that together could become overwhelming for many high schoolers. Yet sports, socializing and other extracurricular activities offer critical life lessons and experiences for young students, so each requires attention, even simply socializing with friends.

"Having too many [work] hours can compromise an adolescent's energy and investment in schoolwork, and that has implications for more than school grades and graduation," Glover says. "Adolescence is a key period of identity development, so time to explore self through social relationships contributes to this development."

To some extent, working hours are determined by law. Minors 14 and 15 years old can work a maximum of 18 hours during a school week and three hours per school day, according to the [U.S. Department of Labor](https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/youthlabor/workhours) Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which does not limit hours for teens 16 and older. However, child labor laws vary by state. In [Georgia](https://dol.georgia.gov/child-labor-work-hour-restrictions), for instance, minors aged 16 and 17 have no work-hour restrictions, but [California labor laws](https://www.minimum-wage.org/california/child-labor-laws) do restrict hours for teens ages 16 and 17. On weekends or during holidays and school breaks, those legal restrictions are often disregarded, leaving teens with little time for recuperating.

**Teens and Pay**

There are also [minimum wage exceptions](https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/youthlabor/wages) for paying employees under 20 years of age. The FLSA allows for a $4.25-per-hour rate for the first 90 days of employment, and full-time students and some others can be paid "less than the minimum wage under special certificates from the Secretary of Labor," [according the U.S. Department of Labor website](https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/youthlabor/wages).

"Employers often skirt the child labor and wage laws, particularly with seasonal or temporary jobs," says attorney Marni Lennon, who is also assistant dean for public interest and pro bono director, HOPE Public Interest Resource Center at [University of Miami School of Law](https://www.law.miami.edu/). "Long shifts without breaks, stipend payment schemes and consecutive evenings of work while a child is in school are likely in violation of the state's labor laws."

For students planning to attend [college](https://money.howstuffworks.com/personal-finance/budgeting/college-savings.htm), keeping an eye on earnings and savings should be a consideration for future financial aid awards. Brown says student earnings are required on the Free Application for [Federal Student Aid](https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/) (FAFSA) and may even impact their eligibility for need-based assistance.

"However, it does not mean that *not* working is the answer to receiving financial aid," Brown says. "Many factors come into play when determining eligibility for financial aid, and work experience has a value on its own that goes beyond just dollars."

**Getting Support at Work**

A supportive boss is another critical part of making a part-time job successful for a teenager. If that boss acknowledges their employee is a student and is willing to put their schooling first, that can really help, McRath explains. But it's also up to the teenager to proactively communicate with their employer — and take responsibility. If they need time off to study, they need to be proactive in getting their shift covered, for instance.

Workplace etiquette that is second nature to adults is unknown territory for teens. Parents should help their teens navigate by ensuring they do things like follow up when applying for a job, submit their school/class schedule in a timely manner and keep up with uniform requirements. And making teens save a portion of each paycheck is a skill that can help them for a lifetime.

NOW THAT'S INTERESTING

**Teens aren't working as much as they used to it seems. Back in 2000, as many as half of U.S. teens were working during at least part of their summers off, doing things like lifeguarding, selling ice cream or even working retail. But since then, the number of teens working summer jobs has dropped. In 2017, about**[**35 percent of teens**](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/02/the-share-of-teens-with-summer-jobs-has-plunged-since-2000-and-the-type-of-work-they-do-has-shifted/)**held summer jobs.**

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