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# Why kids should work (and 10 ideas for jobs)



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OK, maybe kids don't need to start working quite this young, but they don't need to wait until they're 16 either. (Photo: Grekovs/Shutterstock)

Back in the day, most kids held summer jobs and were expected to do real household chores, but these days many families are focused on achievements, extracurriculars and good grades for college applications. (But it's worth noting that colleges [see the value of work experience](#), even elite colleges.) Indeed, high school employment has moved steadily downward in the last 15 years, [according to the Child Trends Data Bank](#). In 1999, 35.5 percent of high schoolers held a job, and by 2014, only 18 percent did.

But life is more expensive these days, and kids learn important life lessons from earning their own bucks. We do our kids a disservice by willingly handing over the funds for them to buy pricey gadgets, says Ron Lieber, New York Times money columnist and author of " [The Opposite of Spoiled: Raising Kids Who Are Grounded, Generous, and Smart about Money](#)." Kids need to learn [how to save and budget](#), skills required for adulthood, and we need to give them practice before the stakes are high. A job also teaches them time management, hones their work ethic and boosts soft skills such as cooperation, task follow-through, independent thinking, self-reliance and getting along with others.

Typically, jobs at fast-food restaurants or grocery stores require teens to be 16, but your kids don't have to wait this long. Tweens and younger teens are industrious, creative and capable people who enjoy being useful. Let them get started early by offering their own services. Aside from babysitting, here are a few ideas to jumpstart a business gig.

**1. Pet-sitter:** Your neighborhood always needs a reliable pet-sitter or dog walker. In my neighborhood, two young sisters set themselves apart with some extra flourishes. For starters, they cared for animals of all kinds, including guinea pigs, birds, fish, reptiles and chickens, in addition to dogs and cats. They hold brief meet-and-greets with new clients, have them fill out a short questionnaire about the pets and provide no-cost extras like opening/closing blinds, turning lights on/off, retrieving mail and watering plants. At the end of the job, they provide a detailed daily record, a small gift bag of handmade dog or cat treats and their business card personalized with a photo of the pet(s). Now *that's* service.



**Teen boy mowing a lawn**  
Have a kid who can handle mowing lawns in the summer or shoveling snow in the winter? People will pay someone to do those chores. (Photo: JNP/Shutterstock)

**2. Gardener:** My high school son did regular gardening this summer, from weeding to pruning to sprucing up the landscaping of a property going on the real estate market. If your child doesn't know much about what weeds look like, help him learn or have a neighbor with a green thumb give him a crash course.

**3. Tech assistant:** Lots of people have technology-related tasks waiting to be done but no time to do them. Does your neighbor need help moving photos from a camera to the computer and saving in the cloud? Could your child help the nearby grandparents with setting up a new smartphone, Blu-ray player or smart TV? Savvy, media-oriented kids have a lot to offer older folks who aren't digital natives.

**4. DJ for birthday parties:** Lieber's young relative and a friend started a DJ business and priced themselves to be affordable for kids' birthday dance parties. If kids set their rates appropriately, they're sure to be hit with parents who need a creative birthday party idea. Plus, little kids love to dance.

**5. Party assistant:** Lots of parents don't even realize they need a helper until they're in the middle of the event. Tweens and teens can help at birthdays with chaperoning, serving snacks and cake or running the activities. There are also graduation parties, bar and bat mitzvahs or other celebrations. A young assistant will be a lifesaver.



Does your child have a knack for making pretty, handmade jewelry? She could sell her trinkets for a small price. (Photo: AndreyCherkasov/Shutterstock)

**6. Jewelry maker:** My 12-year-old niece has made a niche for herself as a budding jeweler, beading necklaces and bracelets and selling them at local farmers markets where the vendor fee is low. She's been known to top \$50. Consider taking a product to the next level by setting up a free website at a site like [GoSpaces](#).

**7. Poop scooper:** No one likes this chore, but if you have a dog and a yard, you need it done. I would hire your child if I owned a dog. To get started, suggest your child post fliers in your neighborhood.

**8. Window washer:** This is another task many people don't have time to do, and elderly people probably shouldn't do if it involves a ladder. Have your child invest in a bucket, a squeegee and a few soft cloths (or old T-shirts). (Of course this one will require supervision to make sure the ladder is steady if the window height requires the use of one.)

**9. Holiday baker:** When I was young, one of my favorite activities was to bake cookies and cakes, but I never thought to take it to the next level. These days, teens are baking and decorating cakes, cupcakes and other treats for special occasions. They can practice decorating cakes for their family to hone their skills.

**10. Tutor:** Is your child skilled in math or spelling or Spanish? More to the point, are they good at explaining concepts to younger kids in an accessible way? Lots of kids do better learning with someone who's not their parent, and young tutor types probably understand Common Core curriculum methods better anyway.

These are just a few suggestions to get the ideas rolling, but ideas are only limited by your child's imagination. Consider whether they have the capital to create items for sale, although I would argue that parents shouldn't subsidize this as it detracts from the money lessons kids need to learn. For more job ideas, check out [How to Make Money as a Kid](#), where you'll also find tips on rates, advertising and how to pick the right idea. If your neighborhood belongs to [Next Door](#), kids can start by posting their services there.

Good luck and have fun! And parents, try not to take over the process.

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