

Talking to your Teen Patients about Work



Millions of adolescents in the United States work.

While work can provide many important benefits, it can also have negative consequences. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) re-ports that each year an estimated 80,000 adolescents under 18 are injured on the job and around 30 die from work-related injuries. Approximately 27,000 are hurt seriously enough to require treatment in hospital emergency departments.

Healthcare providers have an excellent opportunity to counsel teen patients during the high risk transition period from childhood to adulthood. You can play an important role by providing them with information, promoting safe work practices, and encouraging them to know their rights and to speak up when there is a problem. This tipsheet provides a few questions and talking points that can help you and your teen patients talk about work. A list of resources for young workers is located at the end of this tipsheet.

Ask your patient these questions:

? **Do you have a job right now? What kind of job is it?**

? **Do you...**

- **Handle hot liquids and grease**
- **Use cutting tools**
- **Lift heavy objects**
- **Work around wet or greasy floors**
- **Work with powered equipment** (dough mixers, slicers, construction tools)
- **Drive as part of the job**
- **Work with chemicals**

- » The activities highlighted above are prohibited by state and federal labor laws for teens under age 18. There are even more restrictions for 14-15 year olds. (See the *Are You a Working Teen?* fact sheet for more information).
- » There are risks in any job but some jobs are more hazardous than others. It's the employer's responsibility to make sure the workplace is safe.

? **Have you gotten training about safety or health hazards at work and how to protect yourself?**

- » In California, all employers are required to train their workers about the specific hazards of their jobs.
- » Encourage your patients to tell their employer if they notice something hazardous.
- » Teens should always follow safety rules at work, including using protective clothing and equipment (when required).

EVERY DAY OVER 200 TEENS ARE INJURED ON THE JOB IN THE U.S.



How much do you work each day or each week? How late do you work at night? How early in the morning? Do you have enough time for school work? Do you get tired?

- » Talk about whether the number of hours they are working interferes with other activities.
- » Working more than 20 hours per week has been associated with increased drug and alcohol use, fatigue and stress.
- » Child labor laws prohibit teens from working late and/or long hours. (See the *Are You a Working Teen?* fact sheet for more information).



Do you have any concerns about your work? Do you feel comfortable asking questions or speaking up if you're concerned about something you're being asked to do?

- » Young people often do not realize they can question things in the very adult world of work. They need to learn how to do this effectively.
- » Encourage teens to talk to other adults (parents, co-workers, teachers) about any concerns they have, so those adults can help them think through the best solution. Many young workers are injured because they don't speak up.



Do you have any symptoms that you think could be related to your job?

- » If your patient does have an injury or illness that is work related:
 - You must fill out a "Doctor's First Report of Occupational Injury or Illness" form, (Form 5021). The latest version of this form is available online at www.dir.ca.gov/dlsr/dlsrform5021.pdf. Two copies must be sent to the workers' compensation insurer within five days of the initial examination.
 - Encourage patients to report their injury to their employer. If they don't, it may affect their rights to future medical care and other benefits. Refer them to the *Are You a Working Teen?* fact sheet for more information.
- » For more information about the clinician's role in workers' compensation, see: www.dir.ca.gov/dwc/MedicalProvider.htm

Resources

Questions about young worker workplace health and safety:

California Partnership for Young Worker Health and Safety
(888) 933-TEEN
www.youngworkers.org

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
(800) 232-4636
www.cdc.gov/niosh

Cal/OSHA
(800) 963-9424
www.dir.ca.gov/DOSH

Questions about wages or child labor laws:

California Labor Standards Enforcement
(415) 703-5300
www.dir.ca.gov/DLSE

US Dept. of Labor
(866) 487-9243
www.wagehour.dol.gov

Questions about discrimination at work:

California Fair Employment and Housing
(800) 884-1684
www.dfeh.ca.gov

US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
(800) 669-4000
www.youth.eeoc.gov

