

Study: Most parents unaware of teen workplace risks

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Most parents are unaware of the risks their teenagers face in the workplace and could do more to help them understand and prepare for those hazards, according to a new study.

Previous findings have shown that about 80 percent of teens are employed during their high school years. But the study from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Injury Prevention Research Center and North Carolina State University highlights the role [parents](#) play in helping their children get those jobs, and making good decisions about workplace safety and health.

The paper will be published in the July issue of the [Journal of Adolescent Health](#).

About 38 workers under the age of 18 in the U.S. die from work-related injuries each year, while an estimated 146,000 experience nonfatal injuries or illnesses.

"Because parents are so involved with their children about work, they are in an excellent position to help teens ensure that their employers are assuring good safety standards," said Carol Runyan, Ph.D., the study's lead investigator and director of the UNC Injury Prevention Research Center.

"However, parents need to be prepared with good background information so they can use it to monitor workplaces and help their teens

make good decisions," said Runyan, also professor of [health behavior](#) and health education in the Gillings School of Global Public Health and professor of pediatrics in the School of Medicine.

"Parents are playing a very positive role in their children's job searches, we just want to make sure that parents are also helping their children identify potential risks at their jobs, and helping ensure that their children are prepared to cope with those risks," said Michael Schulman, Ph.D., study co-author and William Neal Reynolds Professor of Sociology at NC State.

The researchers interviewed a nationally [representative sample](#) of 922 working teens, as well as a parent of each teen. They found 90 percent of parents helped their teens identify a job opportunity, and 82 percent helped their children fill out job applications.

But parental involvement dropped precipitously once the child was employed. For example, 46 percent of parents had helped their teen ask questions about workplace safety and only 36 percent of parents helped their child learn about youth work restrictions.

Also, when asked how they would respond if they believed their teen might be doing dangerous work, most parents said they would act in some way, rather than adopting a wait-and-see approach. However, parents whose children had confronted actual safety situations were much less aggressive in their reported handling of the situation than they indicated they would be in hypothetical situations.

Runyan and Schulman said questions that parents should ask their working teens include:

- How much training did you receive?

- If you are handling cash, have you been trained about what to do if there is a robbery?
- Are you ever alone in the workplace?
- Are there machinery or tools that could be hazardous?
- Have you been trained on how to deal with an angry customer?
- Is there an adult manager on site?

The researchers are planning additional work to determine how to get parents more informed and more involved. Parents, educators, [teens](#) and employers can find additional information at the U.S. Department of Labor website: <http://www.youthrules.dol.gov/>

More information: [www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(2011\)02810-5/abstract](http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(2011)02810-5/abstract)

Provided by University of North Carolina School of Medicine

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