

PSYCHOLOGIES

This expert Q&A first appeared in psychologies.co.uk

I'm really worried about my professional future and hope you can give me some advice. I'm 17 am a pretty bright student (not brilliant) and am finishing my last year of school in 2010. I've always loved science and have taken biology, physics and chemistry and dream about working in the scientific research field. But my parents are against me doing a science degree at university saying that it is a dead-end street as I'll waste 4 or 5 years at uni with very little job prospects at the end. I'm torn between doing what I love and doing something that will lead to a job. As my parents will fund my studies, if I want to go with my heart, I'll have to convince them that my choice is well thought out. But actually it isn't, so I don't know what to do. It's sure I don't want to do a uni degree to end up working as a shop assistant, but I don't know what more practical route I could take that would keep me in the scientific area and keep my parents happy too. Tx

First of all, it really does sound as though both you and your parents are having this conversation from opposing positions, both based on your instincts and without a good understanding of the others' underlying concerns or values.

It sounds as though your parents are acting from a place of genuine concern that you'll have a real job career to go to at the end of all your hard work. It's natural that they want the best for you and to protect you, and with stories of mounting student debt never far from the news these days, they may simply want you to have thought through what your instincts are so that they can trust them in the way that you are. Or they may want you to go out and earn money now.

Having The Conversation A New Way

Put some time aside with your parents to sit down and really talk about the situation. It's as important that you all have an opportunity to express your concerns calmly and get a better understanding about what they think you should do instead. Book time with them specifically to talk about this; make an agreement between you all to stay calm (have 'time-out's if necessary) and to have equal air-time, so that you can each hear the others' concerns first hand and explore ways to move this on. Listen carefully for the concerns beneath their words – for example, are they worried about supporting you through university? Or do they believe you are better suited to another field? You don't need to agree with them, but gaining their support for your choices will come easier if they've had a chance to be properly heard and their views welcomed.

Before you do, make sure you're well informed about what attracts you to this work, what kinds of career options and salary expectations and what kind of degree would give you most flexibility at this stage.

Know What's Important

Take some time to get clear yourself about what it is that attracts you to the field of scientific research. It sounds too that scientific research and what that means to you might be a reflection of some of your most deeply held values, so I'd suggest you start by capturing what that field means to you, and if you were in it what would be important about that. Just keep asking yourself, 'and what's important about that?' – it's a bit like peeling an onion – you want to get to the heart of it.

Think about whether it's research in general; or in a specific area? Is it working in a commercial organisation or a not-for-profit? Then ask yourself again, 'what's important about that? Ask yourself 'if I had this in my life who would I be?' Look at the careers sections of the papers and find jobs that appeal to you and highlight the words that stand out most.

If you're visual you might want to create a collage that captures what you discover; or if you prefer write it all down in a journal. Once you are clearer about what values of yours might that work honour, you might also consider where else and how else could you honour them in work or in life generally as hobbies and interests. For example, let's imagine that you had a value of 'discovery' how else could that be in your life?

Explore the Facts

I'd suggest you also do some fact-finding into scientific research careers so that your parents have a sense that you have really thought about this rather than just relied on your heart.

- [Jobs4u Career Database \(takes you directly to their science careers section\)](#)
- [Prospects.ac.uk \(takes you directly to their science careers section\)](#)

Try narrowing your search down to your top 3 options and then make contact with people in those jobs and see if you can spend some time working with them – a sort of taster. You can do this as a holiday job, part-time working at weekends/evenings (depending on your schedule); by arranging to meet with them and 'interview' them about the job. Create a file to store all your ideas, research and even job adverts.

If your parents want you to earn money more quickly, or need you to support yourself more financially what part-time work would you be willing to explore whilst you study? Consider a gap year where you might work in a scientific environment to get a better understanding of it.

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