

Struggling with career advice for my kids

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Young people are the future.

That has always been the case.

What has changed are the spectrum of careers and ways post-secondary institutions prepare our young to tackle the great unknown. With one daughter in university, the jury is still out on whether our education system is adequately preparing our kids as future leaders and decision-makers.

Lexie is still finding her academic "legs" and making sense of her courses and program intricacies. Our heroine of equality and veteran of several humanitarian mission trips, Lexie indicated she may want to pursue a career in human rights law. Law school? OMG, how do I even begin to prepare for such a move?

Don't get me wrong, having a lawyer in the family would make Mark a happy camper. But at this point, I have no idea how to get from Point A to Point B. Even if I dig up our entire back yard, I don't think I'll find an iron box filled with gold coins.

Plan B would be a monstrous student debt that Lexie would have to struggle with once she attains her goal. We'll be there for her, every step of the way. I know I'll have to stock up on ant-acids and hair dye, but I signed up for the long haul.

Lexie is taking advanced humanities at Western, with an eye to working with an NGO and international aid. She's been on several volunteer humanitarian missions and believes this is her calling. She's had our full support, and even received a helping hand from the King community when she went to Kenya to work on local projects. This August, she hopes to do some volunteer work in Peru. All that is well and good, but the challenge is channelling all of this into a career path. We know we can get help from services like [this resume service Michigan](#) when it comes to getting the perfect resume written and ready to send when she applies for her chosen career, but we still don't quite know what that career is going to be just yet.

Luckily, we met with Richard Chapman from World Vision at their Canadian head office in Mississauga. A chat and tour gave Lexie a lot of information about this organization and other NGOs.

While Kim and I have been the rock solid parental support units, I admit I'm a bit lost in offering any recommendations to my children. I see myself and my role as a senator ? the voice of "sober second thought." I fear I will be seen as the dream crusher and the dad who doesn't believe in his children.

My son Liam, who's in Grade 10, is already stressing over his career, and decision on what high school courses and credits he needs. He wants to be an astronaut. My unfiltered response to such a goal was "who doesn't?" Every boy wants to be an astronaut. I've already dampened his spirits somewhat, because my inner voice of reason escapes. Hey, I get it. It sounds like a great goal, but definitely not an easy one. And definitely not a straightforward journey either.

I told him most astronauts are doctors, scientists or engineers in some field before they apply to the space program and get shot up into space. There's nothing wrong with loving space and I've been thinking of some ways I can encourage his passion. Maybe I'll take him to a museum like the one they have in Houston. They have several museums in the city, as well as other fun things to try,

but their space museum looks amazing ([more here](#)). I'm hoping if he learns more about space travel, he might focus more on getting a career in engineering or science rather than setting his heart on going into space. After all, the Canadian Space Agency takes about two applicants per year, from a pool of thousands.

I don't want to break his heart, but these are not betting odds.

He was also quite taken aback when I said that most astronauts only make one trip into the final frontier, making way for others on the waiting list. It's a very small field.

Since 1983, only 12 Canadians have been selected to become astronauts. Ten are now retired from CSA and there are two active astronauts.

One of the frequently asked questions is whether you can cry in space. Yes, but the balls of tears stick to your eyes.

"What do they do when they return to earth?" Liam asked. Well, some continue to work for the CSA under contract. Judging from past experience, some become university professors, even politicians.

None of these interested my boy child.

Another option was sending him to military school, something I've threatened to do countless times in the past few years, mostly to modify his behaviour. This way, he'd get an education, a rank and even a job! While some aspects of the military do interest Liam, I don't know if he'd be thrilled by basic training, or dedicating a decade of his early life to service.

I've asked for input from many people I know, to help guide my son in his quest.

A chat with Jim Middleton, a veteran in the space industry, helped somewhat. He has worked on many NASA and CSA projects and mission and still consults. Middleton is a big booster of promoting young scientists.

Liam was given advice fitting for anyone interested in such things ? excel at math and science and work your butt off!

Another former space industry engineer from King said our government's current financial commitment to the space program is sadly lacking.

It's up to private enterprise to pick up the slack and while some are making great strides to create everything from robots to satellites, there's not much support in sending men and women into space. We may have to wait another few generations before we ever see a Captain Kirk. But private enterprise will one day be hiring astronauts to pilot their craft.

It's fairly easy to send a kid to school and toss money at post-secondary institutions, in the hopes they prepare our young for what's to come.

It's quite another matter for a young, impressionable student to develop a passion for their chosen career. There are no guarantees. While there was a time when university grads were sought-after commodities and could write their own tickets, the world is a much different place.

It's much more competitive, fluid, fleeting, expensive, complicated ...

Parents all strive to give their children more than we had. We want them to succeed and we try to pass on nuggets of wisdom to make their journey less harrowing.

But in the end, we all learn by doing.

"She believed she could so she did," reads a sign on my youngest daughter's bedroom door.

I really hope so.