

Navigating Post-Secondary Pathways: Embracing Diverse Journeys

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Conversations about university applications, deadlines and admissions are inevitable, but can also feel overwhelming. Here's an important reminder: Not everyone has to rush into university immediately. Post-secondary isn't a one-size-fits-all journey, and there are multiple pathways that can be considered.

Going Straight to Post-Secondary

For some students, entering their post-secondary institutions immediately after high school is what they would prefer to ensure continuity in their academic journey. It can be a great choice for people who may have researched and may be confident in their chosen fields of study and are eager to begin working towards their degrees.

Taking a Gap Year—A Time for Growth and Exploration

The most important thing to remember is that it's okay to take a gap year, or two, or however long you need before diving into university. Everyone's journey looks different and there's no "right" way to approach higher education. In fact, about 13% of Canadian students take gap years to explore their interests, gain work or life experience or simply recharge after high school (Frenette, 2022). An increasing number of students choose this route every year. Taking time to figure out what you really want can lead to greater success and happiness in the long run.

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Entering the Workforce—Gaining Real-World Experience

Some people may instead choose to enter the workforce directly after high school, gaining valuable professional experience and independence. This can be a good path for individuals who want to explore career interests, develop skills or even save money for future educational opportunities. Work experiences can be a good way for people to clarify long-term goals and find a strong sense of direction in their lives.

Applications Don't Have to Be So Stressful!

If post-secondary is part of your plan, the application process can seem daunting, but it doesn't have to be. The key is to break it down into smaller, more manageable steps.

- Take it one day at a time: You don't have to complete every application in one sitting. Spread it out over days or weeks.
- Avoid rushing the process: While applying early can be helpful for some, it's perfectly okay to apply during the regular admissions cycle if you need more time.
- Seek support: Guidance counselors, mentors and other resources can help you navigate applications and make informed decisions.
- Normalize the experience: Feeling overwhelmed by university applications is common. Did you know that about half of Canadian students report finding the process significantly stressful (Sanders, 2019). You're not alone, and support is available.

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Post-secondary education is a personal journey, and there's no single path to follow. Whether you're applying to university immediately after high school, taking a gap year or pursuing an entirely different path, what matters most is finding the route that works best for you. Be kind to yourself, take your time, embrace your unique journey and remember that success is defined by what feels right for you.

References

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