THE WAY

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SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD WITH SUBJECT SELECTION

Many students are currently in the process of subject selection. Choosing subjects can feel like a significant moment for both students and parents. Subject selection is rarely just about subjects; for many parents, it represents their child's future, identity and life opportunities. This is why the process can become emotionally loaded.

Common Beliefs Parents Hold About Subject Selection

a. "Subject choice determines future success"
Many parents believe that the "right" subjects provide a direct pathway to university entry, career stability, and long-term success.
Underlying assumption: Early decisions are high-stakes and potentially irreversible.

b. "Keeping options open is always best"
Parents often encourage the most academically rigorous or broad combinations (e.g. higher-level maths or science), believing this maximises future flexibility.
Underlying assumption: More demanding choices = more opportunities later.

c. "Some pathways are inherently more valuable than others"
There can be an implicit hierarchy of subjects linked to status (e.g. STEM over creative arts, ATAR pathways over vocational options).
Underlying assumption: Worth and security are tied to certain professions.

d. "My child should build on their strengths (as seen through marks)"

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Parents often equate success with areas where the child performs well, rather than where they feel most engaged or curious.
Underlying assumption: Performance predicts long-term fulfilment.

e. “I know what will be best based on experience”

Parents may draw on their own schooling or career paths, which is often based on the underlying assumption that a parent’s perspective is more informed than the child’s emerging self-knowledge.

It is an exciting time, but it can also bring uncertainty and, at times, conflict between parent and child. The good news is that, with the right approach, subject selection can become a positive and empowering experience that builds young people’s confidence in their decision-making.

A significant challenge for parents is managing their own fears during this process. While parents tend to focus on the potential long-term impact of subject choices, students are often more concerned with the present, prioritising interest, enjoyment and a sense of belonging.

It is completely natural for parents to feel anxious at this time. These worries often come from a place of care, but they can subtly influence conversations.

This moment often reflects a developmental tension

- - Parents tend to focus on the future (security, pathways, consequences)
- - Students are focused on the present and their emerging identity (interest, enjoyment, belonging)

When this tension is not acknowledged, it can lead to pressure or conflict.

What we can do to Help our Children

A powerful shift in thinking is to move from:

“This decision will determine my child’s future”

to:

“This is one step in my child’s life where I can support them to learn how to make good decisions about their future.”

This reframes subject selection as:

- - A developmental task (building agency, insight, and responsibility)
- - Not just a high-stakes, one-off decision

It can also be helpful for parents to remember that long-term success is shaped not only by subject choices, but by a young person’s engagement, sense of ownership, and ability to adapt.

By stepping back, regulating our own anxiety, and staying curious about our child’s perspective, can provide the kind of support that truly benefits our child.

I wish you well on this journey.

Mrs Jacoline Petersen
Director of Student Counselling

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