



Scientist Mentor Idea #5

SHARING YOUR TOXICOLOGY CAREER WITH K-12 STUDENTS

WHAT IS TOXICOLOGY? WHAT DO TOXICOLOGISTS DO? Share the excitement and rewards of your field with younger students in need of career advice. Here are some ideas for interacting with K-12 students as CAREER MENTORS in classrooms, career fairs, or at your own workplace.

If you encounter anyone in a K-12 audience who tells you that they aspire to be a toxicologist and knows what that is--then we'd like to hear about that! Few movies and TV shows ever mention the word "toxicologist". School guidance councilors are usually uninformed about careers in toxicology. As a result, most children have never even heard of toxicology. You can help remedy that!

1. Anticipating Questions K-12 Students Frequently Ask About Careers

Students in different classes frequently ask the same questions. Some of them are listed below. Try to make your answers straightforward, clear, and concise and interesting. Be truthful but try not to stress any negative aspects of the job or training required (many years of school, long hours). They will learn about these as they mature and understand that they go with the territory. Your goal should be to interest them in toxicology so they consider it as a potential career!

- How did you choose your career?
- What exactly do you do during a typical day?
- What do you like most about your work? What do you like least?
- How much do you make? How much can you make?
- Did you like math/science when you were in school?
- How do you manage your career and family life?
- What suggestions would you have for a student interested in a career such as yours?

2. Participating in Career Days and Career Fairs: Opportunities and Ideas for Informal Show and Tell

Students like to touch and see. Look around your office or lab for things that you use in your work, are portable, may be unusual to students, and help explain what you do (see other Scientist Mentor Idea sheets for tips).

If you choose to use slides, PowerPoint, or other audiovisual aids, BE INNOVATIVE! Your presentation/demonstration should be interactive. Avoid lecturing (students will become bored). Remember to let the students ask questions. You should allow questions to be asked **during** your presentation, and leave adequate time for more at the end.

Try to do evaluations. This is important to help with future presentations. If possible give a quick (verbal) quiz at the beginning and end and award small prizes (could be gift certificates for books, CDs, products from your company, etc).

3. Inviting Individual Students and Teachers or Entire Classes into Your Workplace:

Some suggestions ...

- Consider inviting a teacher or student to your workplace to observe activities, work on a project, or simply observe a day in the life of a Toxicologist/Scientist. You could, perhaps, become a mentor to that teacher or student!
- Consider inviting an entire class to visit your workplace for a tour and perhaps a demonstration of key activities.
- Consider establishing a partnership between your workplace and a school where employees visit classrooms, and become mentors.
- Consider becoming a student pen pal!

4. Understanding Your Audience

Keep in mind that students of various ages perceive the word "career" very differently. Students in middle school (4th-8th grades) are increasingly receptive to discussions about career opportunities, but many do not truly understand the differences between "career" and "job". Furthermore, at this age, many of them may be easily turned off by the idea of choosing a lifelong-career that involves many more years of school.

You can expect students in high school to be more receptive to the reality of what it takes to succeed in the adult world. Many understand that careers that provide good salaries often require hard work. Some will not aspire toward a career because their environment does not expose them to a lot of options. Others will still be hoping for careers in sports, show business, or other similar fields. Often, however, you can expect a few to tell you that they want to become doctors, nurses or dentists.

Thus, tailor your comments to your audience. For younger students stress some of the basic, but exciting, aspects of your work. For older students suggest colleges and universities they may want to look at, potential majors they might consider, and financial rewards they may reap. Keep the discussion focused more on the benefits and less on the work involved. Your goal should be to make toxicology sound exciting so it is something they consider as they mature and pursue their career!

Credits: Scientist Mentor Ideas are a creation of the K-12 Education Subcommittee of the Society of Toxicology's Education Committee. Many of these ideas came from teachers and toxicologists who participated in the annual "Paracelsus Goes to School" K-12 teacher workshops sponsored by the SOT with support from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.