



# How to Talk to Your Family About Taking a Gap Year



A Practical Guide

## Introduction

# Be the architect of your own life.

**F**rom the moment we're born, our lives are planned out for us. We grow up on gold stars and time-outs. As we get older, we're ushered into the world of school, extracurriculars, and test prep. Our grades and trophies become the talismans of our success. We're told this is all necessary for preparing ourselves for The Future: the great unknown. And somewhere along the way, we're expected to figure out where we're going.

Sometimes, the only way to figure it out is to step off of the path you know and outside of your comfort zone. It starts with the little things, like boarding a flight on your own or learning how to navigate a new city's subway system. As you go on, these little things get bigger and bigger—until one day, you realize you've gained the courage to face life's challenges, and the confidence to make your own choices. You realize you have the power to design a life that feels true to you.

**At the end of the day, taking a gap is about becoming your own person. And who could say no to that?**

# Tips & Talking Points

So—you're thinking about taking a gap, and you need help when it comes to getting your family on board. At EF Gap Year, we've helped hundreds of families through conversations like these, and we've learned a thing or two along the way.

## **TIP #1: START WITH WHY.**

Reflect on your own reasons for taking a gap. Why is it important to you to do this? Why now?

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Big choices are coming down the road: what to major in; what career to pursue; where to live; what kind of lifestyle will make me happy. In order to figure out what I want in life, I need to see what's out there first.
- I'm not ready to go straight to college. I need time to figure out who I am and find what motivates me.
- I want to travel and see the world before I start working, because I know I won't get another chance in the future to do something like this.

## TIP #2: EXPLAIN HOW THIS WILL HELP YOUR FUTURE.

Ultimately, your parents just want what's best for you. Help them feel better about taking the leap by showing how this is an investment in your future.

Below are some handy facts to have at the ready:

- A recent study found that gap year students earned GPAs that were **.1-.4 points higher** than their peers—even when controlling for other factors.<sup>1</sup>
- Gap year students were **more likely** to graduate in 4 years, compared to the national average of 6 years.<sup>1</sup>
- 97% of gap alumni report increased **maturity** and 96% report increased **self-confidence**.<sup>2</sup>
- 60% of gap year alumni say their gap year helped **define their career path**, and 77% said it helped them **find their purpose in life**.<sup>2</sup>
- Studying abroad had a positive effect on **14 out of the 15 skills** most valued by employers.<sup>3</sup>
- At a recent gap year conference, 5 universities in attendance unanimously agreed that gap students had a **faster upward trajectory** than their peers.<sup>4</sup>

1. 2012 study conducted at UNC Chapel Hill/Middlebury College

2. 2015 National Alumni Survey conducted by the Gap Year Association

3. 2017 study by the Institute of International Education

4. 2020 Gap Year Association Conference

**TIP #3: PREPARE RESPONSES TO COMMON QUESTIONS.**

**Q: What if you don't return to college?**

**A:** According to the Gap Year Association, 90% of students who take a gap year actually return to college within a year, so there's a good chance I'll send you a postcard from campus next year!

**Q: Will you have a difficult transition back to school?**

**A:** The whole point of taking a gap is to make the transition to college easier. The experience will make me a better student because it'll help me figure out my academic interests and rediscover my love for learning. It will also make me better-adjusted to college life, because I'll learn how to live away from home, make new friends, and manage my time better.

**Q: What will everyone think?**

**A:** Gap years are becoming more widely accepted now. Malia Obama took a gap before her freshman year at Harvard. In fact, the Harvard admissions committee has encouraged students to take gap years for the past 30 years. In some European countries, it's basically a rite of passage to take a gap year before entering university.

Besides—I'm not spending a year/semester doing nothing. I'll be gaining real-life experiences and skills that will give me a leg up in school. Many people regret not taking a gap year. I don't want to be one of those people.

### **Q: How does the EF Gap Year program work?**

**A:** EF Gap Year lets students experience a variety of places through well-rounded programming, exposing them to new cultures, industries, and ways of life.

On the [EF Gap Year program](#), students can choose three destinations to explore in depth through language immersion, service learning, and an internship. They participate in guided group excursions (immersive tours of Europe, Australia, and New Zealand) and wrap up with EF Leadership Academy, where students reflect on what they've learned and how to apply it to their future.

On the [EF Gap Semester program](#), students can explore two destinations in depth from different perspectives. There are program offerings in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Students also kick off with a tour of Europe and close out their semester with EF Leadership Academy.

### **Q: Are you just going to have fun for a year?**

**A:** I will be having fun, but more importantly, I'll be learning and growing a lot! EF's programming is based on key experiential learning outcomes and designed to prepare us for success in college and adulthood.

I'll gain cross-cultural awareness, language fluency, and international work experience. I'll collaborate with community-based NGOs. I'll participate in leadership development activities at EF Leadership Academy. Best of all, you'll be shocked by how mature and independent I'll be when I return home!

### **Q: Is this company legitimate?**

**A:** EF Education First is an international company that has been in operation for 50+ years. In that time, they've sent millions of students around the globe (literally). They have a presence in 115 countries around the world.

Other fun facts: EF is the official language sponsor of the Olympics, affiliated with the Hult Prize, and a partner to the United Nations.

### **Q: How will you travel during the pandemic?**

**A:** EF is taking safety and sanitation very seriously. To see what precautions they're taking, [click here](#).

### **Q: How can you justify the cost?**

**A:** College is expensive, and taking a gap would help me make the most of the investment. If I start off with a better idea of what I want to study, I'll be able to avoid changing majors and wasting time. If I'm feeling more motivated to learn, I'll probably do better in my classes and graduate on time. Did you know that 60% of college students in the U.S. take over 6 years to graduate?<sup>5</sup>

The [EF program fee](#) also includes all flights, transfers, and accommodations. They take care of all the programming/logistics on the ground, including classes at an accredited language school. The fee also includes 24/7 support, mentorship, and interview coaching for internships. For info about scholarships and fundraising, [click here](#).

# What's next?

Congratulations! You took the first step towards making your dream gap year or semester a reality.

Here's what to do next:

## 1. Get your parents on the phone.

Your expert EF Gap Year Consultant will walk you and your parents through our programs to help you find the one that's right for you. We'll answer all of your questions and concerns.

- [Schedule a call](#) or call us directly at 1-800-726-9746

## 2. Complete your application.

- [Click here](#) to start your application

**3. Pack light and get yourself to the airport. We'll take it from there!**

# Additional Resources

## For Parents:

Gap Year Info for Parents  
What is a Gap Year?  
Gap Year Benefits  
Our Educational Philosophy

## Program Info:

EF Gap Year Program  
EF Gap Semester Programs  
Gap Year Webinars  
Program Fees  
Scholarships & Fundraising

## Around the Web:

“Considering a Gap Year”  
(Harvard College Admissions)

“Gap Year Data & Benefits”  
(Gap Year Association)

“Gap year students reflect on their decision to take time off”  
(The Dartmouth)

“How To Have A Meaningful Gap Year” (Refinery 29)