

Taking a gap year

Your son or daughter has announced they want to take a gap year. All sorts of questions may leap to mind..... Is it a good idea? What will they gain? Will it affect their chances of getting into university? Is it just an excuse for an extended holiday? What about money? If going travelling, do they have the skills and independence needed to cope and keep safe?

Taking a gap year can be a very beneficial experience, offering the chance for your son or daughter to develop in maturity and broaden their experiences. So how can you make sure they use their gap year constructively?

Here are a few pointers.

Explore their reasons.....

Encourage your son or daughter to pinpoint exactly **why** they want to take a gap year and **what** they want to achieve. They may want to:

- take a breather from education
- earn some money
- create some time to think about their future
- have some adventures and new experiences
- gain some work experience relevant to their career plans
- develop new skills.

Being clear about their aims will help your son or daughter to better identify the most suitable opportunities.

What about university?

Your son or daughter can apply for university whilst still at school/college and defer their entry, or apply during their year out.

If clear about the course they want to do, applying while still at school/college will, hopefully, get everything sorted as soon as exam results come out. If applying during their gap year, they will need to be around to complete their application during the autumn and may need to be available later on for possible interviews. However, delaying their application does provide more time to decide on future courses. Discuss with your son or daughter which approach is best for them.

Generally, university admissions staff are supportive of gap years so long as they are constructively spent. If applying and deferring, however, it's advisable to check with specific course providers that they are happy to accept deferred entries. Applicants need to include their gap year plans in their UCAS application.

What to do?

Images of backpacking around Asia or working on conservation projects in Africa may spring to mind. But there are all sorts of options. Make sure your son or daughter has considered all of them. Here's a starting point list:

- Voluntary work – the UK offers numerous opportunities – they might do something related to their career idea. If looking abroad, numerous gap year providers offer all sorts of opportunities, although some are costly. When researching, look carefully at the level of local support provided by the organisation once abroad. Also, look at the volunteering article on the Parental Guidance website.
- Paid work – to earn money (although any work experience will also help your son or daughter to develop valuable skills) and/or to gain experience related to their career idea. Investigate the Year in Industry programme (see website below).
- Develop new skills – e.g. learn a new language, further develop ICT skills.
- Travelling – research and preparation is the key to a successful trip.

In reality, many young people end up doing a combination of activities over the year.

Make the most of available advice and information

There's plenty of it! Here are a few useful websites.

Year Out Group – an association of leading year out programme providers, their website offers lots of advice and links to member organisations - www.yearoutgroup.org

The Year in Industry - www.etrust.org.uk/the-year-in-industry

Government advice - www.gov.uk/gap-year-foreign-travel-advice

Volunteering Matters - www.volunteeringmatters.org.uk

Other websites providing advice and information include:

www.gapwork.com

www.ucas.com/alternatives/gap-year/gap-years-ideas-and-things-think-about

www.independentgapadvice.org

www.gapyear.com

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