

Does Your Teen Want to Take a Gap Year Before College?

In Europe, many teens take a year off between high school and college. They call it a “gap year.” The idea is catching on in America as students learn of the advantages of taking a year off before starting college.

Many parents fear that their teen will never go to college if they take a year off. Some think that their student will forget how to study. Others believe that a gap year is a way to avoid real life.

College counselors and deans have a different view. They suggest that students who have taken a gap year come to college with energy, enthusiasm and focus. College tuition is not cheap. Many students who experience a structured gap year are more mature. They are interested in learning and ready to study rather than party.

Time between high school and college is a natural time for a break. Reasons why students might consider taking a gap year at this time include:

- A break from study. Some students have felt pressure to get good grades and high test scores. They have spent many hours studying and being involved in school activities. By the end of four years, they feel burnt out.
- Time to work and save money for college.



- The chance to learn new skills like computing, a new language or teaching.
- Time to explore career options and a college major.
- The chance to help less privileged people by working or volunteering.
- A desire to travel to a new country and experience a different culture.

Most colleges and universities welcome students who have taken a well-planned gap year. It shows that these students are serious about expanding their horizons. Colleges want kids who are interested in learning new and useful skills. Time spent away from home on their own also decreases their chance of getting homesick.

A gap year, however, is not a year to lie on the couch and watch television. It is about “real life” learning. A gap year is time for your teen to do something productive. It should help her develop skills that promote success in college.

If your teen is interested in a gap year, experts recommend that she look for and apply to a college. After she has been accepted, she should talk to the admissions counselor. Ask if admission can be delayed for one semester or a year.

Taking a gap year does not have to be scary for a parent. Do your research and help your teen have the experience of a lifetime.

Call the Parent Help Line. We listen. We can find you help.
1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week.