

10 questions to ask instead of “So what's your plan for next year?”

Pick one, not ten. Ask it sideways — in the car, while cooking, on a walk — then let the answer arrive in its own time.

1 What are you curious about at the moment?

Curiosity is easier to answer than ambition.

2 What would you like to be better at next year?

Skills are choosable. Careers feel permanent.

3 Whose job looks interesting to you?

People are a softer entry point than industries.

4 What would make this a year you're glad you took?

Let them define success in their own words.

5 What's the part you're least looking forward to?

The fear is often the real blocker.

6 What would you try if you could stop after a month?

Remove the weight of permanence.

7 What do you want to be able to show for this year?

Introduce evidence gently.

8 What's the smallest thing you could do this week?

One email, call or conversation.

9 What do you need from me — and what should I stay out of?

Give them ownership and yourself a useful role.

10 When should we talk about this again?

Create a rhythm instead of an ambush.

AVOID: comparing · solving it in one sitting · asking in front of other people

BY DECEMBER

A good gap year should have produced...

Not necessarily a career decision. Evidence.

- One adult outside the family who would give them a reference.
- Some money earned, however small.
- Two or three experiences they can describe properly.
- One skill they can demonstrate, not just claim.
- Something they organised from start to finish.
- At least one thing they tried and decided against.
- A shortlist for next year that is narrower than January's.
- A Proof Folder of photos, references, outputs and reflections.

MID-YEAR CHECK

If fewer than three are on track by June, change something while there is still time.

Confidence is not a pep talk.
Confidence is evidence.