

# Breaking it to your parents that you're not going home (yet)

This is the time of year when many of us are forced to ask ourselves daunting questions such as: *Who am I? Where am I going? What am I doing with my life? Should I stay or should I go? Can I be this happy anywhere else? Am I happy now? Should I continue my education? Should I start my career? Should I be closer to my family?*

More often than not, we opt to *mañana mañana* these questions until this time next year by renewing our contracts as teaching assistants, switching Auxiliar programs, or continuing to hustle however we hustle and upholding the status quo of tapas, terrazas, low rent, and budget-friendly hedonism.



It is often difficult to break the news of your decision to stay abroad to your parents, especially if they believe with conviction that the *American Dream* is not only feasible, but that the pursuit of it is the only respectable way to live.

## **What your parents might expect of you:**

While success is subjective across generations and cultures, for many American parents the epitome of success for their offspring can entail any of the following:

- Acquiring a fancy masters degree and/or PhD
- Commitment to an uphill career path, working 65-80 hours per week
- Marriage to another real adult with ambition and drive

so that you can be a power couple

- Owning a house and a fondue set for entertaining guests
- Being able to do your own taxes and paperwork
- Assorted antiquated concepts of normalcy that you are critical of after growing accustomed to a simpler life that is lived on your own terms.



Some families want to have, or feel that they deserve, a say in the decision-making process of their progeny to steer them away from a life of permanent squalor. Understandably their patience for the *mañana mañana* mindset will inevitably run thin. With each additional year that their beloved child spends teaching abroad, earning a wage that would be considered below poverty-level in the United States, parents will inevitably go through the stages of grief for their child's futures as they were once envisioned.

Disclaimer: I'm well aware that there is no one-size-fits-all relationship between parents and kin. Just as there are parents who do not attempt to sway their offspring in any direction, there are kin who do not care whether or not their parents approve of their lifestyle.

# What your parents might say and how to respond:

Below are some predicted comments from your parents that will indicate what stage of grief they are in, accompanied by an advisable response to help them manage their expectations.

## **Denial: “This is just a phase, you’ll outgrow it.”**

- With Hemingway-esque detail, explain in depth your passion for your adopted city
- Perhaps Madrid stimulates you creatively in a way that is unmatched anywhere else
- Maybe your heart was stolen by a person, or the cuisine
- Teaching English is fulfilling (or at least more tolerable than any alternative)
- Once you leave, the neighboring European countries will never again be this accessible

## **Anger: “You’re out of touch with reality. TEFLing is not a Real Job™.”**

- You are constantly learning via exposure to other languages, cultures and ways of life
- You have either achieved bilingual status or are making progress towards it
- Your overworked friends back home often send you envious messages
- You are still nurturing valuable resume skills in your teaching jobs:
  - the ability to speak publicly, projecting your voice without fear
  - generating clients and operating your own brand with *clases particulares*
  - often adapting to changing circumstances

- Ask them to elaborate on what a real job entails and why having one is so important, seeing as it is common for elderly folks on their deathbeds to voice regretting the amount of time that they spent at the office
- Side effects of chasing the American dream include delusion, anxiety, and alienation



**Bargaining: “You can live at home with us while you get back on your feet, use the car and eat our food. We’ll keep the kitchen stocked with bagels.”**

- Express gratitude but don’t waver in the face of temptation



**Depression: "We had such high hopes for you."**

- When faced with their disappointment, remind them that you have your own hopes and dreams, albeit unconventional ones.
- Reiterate that you love and appreciate them despite not seeing eye-to-eye on these matters
- Stress that while their approval is important to you, it would be a necessary sacrifice if weighed against the life abroad that you have created

**Acceptance: "Ok, make your own choices. We trust your judgment."**

- At this stage thank them for their council throughout your decision-making process.

Although I'm certain that we collectively do not want Donald Trump to rise to the presidency, it would at least make a non-issue of the *Should I stay or Should I go* debate. Please feel free to share your own experiences breaking the news to your

parents in the comment section!

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