

Relationship Summary

Family: Bill Ortiz (pronouns: he/him/his) and Brittney Ortiz (she/her/hers)

Overview: Bill is an environmental health scientist who attended Texas A&M along with many generations of his family. Bill is Brittney's father and wants his children to follow in his footsteps and have a successful career. Brittney is Bill's daughter, a sophomore Kinesiology major with a concentration in dance and plans to own a dance studio one day. After she ends her sophomore year, Brittney goes home for the summer to spend time with her family where Bill takes the opportunity to discuss Brittney's choice of career path. Brittney is passionate about her chosen career in dance and stands up for herself against her father. The scenario ends with both of them having to find compromise.

Starter Card

Bill Ortiz (*Pronouns: he, him, his*)

Meet Bill. Bill is an environmental health scientist who attended Texas A&M along with many generations of his family. He and his wife, Karen, met in their early 20s. With many of the same interests, values, and goals, they quickly fell in love, married, and welcomed their daughter, Brittney, just a year later. Bill grew up with traditional family values where the husband was expected to be a provider or head of the household, you respect your elders, and politely address people as “sir” or “ma’am”. He would like Brittney to take some of these values into her own life and, as his only child, follow in his footsteps as much as possible. Bill is proud that Brittney is an independent thinker, since that is something he and Karen always encouraged, but he also gets frustrated with what he considers to be her defiance during their conversations about college and career aspirations, especially when she challenges his authority as her father and his way of thinking.

Brittney Ortiz (*Pronouns: she, her, hers*)

Meet Brittney. Brittney is a sophomore at Texas A&M and comes from a family full of Fighting Texas Aggies! Brittney never had a second thought about coming to Aggieland: she fell in love with the campus at an early age when she would visit it with her parents. However, Brittney has always known she had very different career interests than her dad, Bill, who has openly expressed disagreement and concern about her choices. Brittney has chosen to major in Kinesiology with a concentration in dance science, and wants to get enough experience to own her own studio after she graduates. She recently applied for an internship to get more practical experience and just a few days ago, she found out she was accepted to participate this summer. She is about to go visit her parents and is excited to tell them all about it, but she is also stressed about how her dad might react. Brittney hopes that her dad will just come to accept her goals, but she is also prepared to call on her mom, Karen, and her best friend, Chloe, for support if this doesn't go well¹.

Go to Family Card #1

¹ This is an example of **independence**.

Although Brittney's dad, Bill, disagrees with the value of her major, Brittney is still free to make choices independent of his wishes. Brittney experiences a stress response to the idea of having a conversation about her internship offer and acceptance, but at no time does the idea of that conversation make Brittney feel unsafe or threatened. Bill and Karen impressed upon Brittney the value of independence, and while there is conflict around the sustainability of Brittney's major, at no time in this scenario is Brittney given an ultimatum by her parents, threatened to be kicked out of her home, disowned, or cut off from resources if she doesn't change her major. Chloe also fosters Brittney's independence, encouraging her to pursue her interests and to get involved at Texas A&M. Their friendship is reciprocally supportive, and does not include elements of unhealthy competition, attachment, or communication.

Family Card #1

Brittney arrives home for to visit her parents for the weekend, and her first night there was great! Her mom and dad were excited to see her, and Brittney just wanted to embrace that feeling instead of breaking the news about the internship right away. So, they had dinner together and then Brittney went up to her room to get some sleep.

In the morning, Brittney is in the kitchen making some coffee and Bill greets her:

Bill: *"Hey sweetie! I am so glad you're home. Your mom and I have missed you so much."*

Brittney: *"Morning dad! I'm happy to be home too. It has been a long semester, everything with my major is really getting intense now. I've learned a lot this semester and would love to share it with y'all."*

Bill hesitates for a few seconds and then says sarcastically: *"Oh...I'm sure you have learned a lot."*

Brittney: *"Come on dad, what is that supposed to even mean?!"*

Bill: *"I know you love to dance, but this is a hobby not a real major. There isn't a successful path or money in that field. I didn't encourage you to get a degree in something that seems like a childhood fantasy or the answer a child would give the question 'what do you want to be when you grow up?'"*

Brittney: *"Wow dad....none of this is true at all. There are so many successful people who began in my major, even at Texas A&M. It really makes me feel bad when you talk to me like I am still a child, and you insult my major like this."*

Bill: *"I realize we are not agreeing, I just feel that this career path isn't going to take you far."*

Go to Family Card #2

Family Card #2

Brittney: *"I feel like we are running in circles with this conversation. You can't even begin to understand what I have been learning in school. You are being closed-minded by trying to make me live your life, not my own!"*

Bill: *"Brittney, I don't like the tone you are using with me right now. It is disrespectful. I think it's best if we revisit this conversation at a different time, when you aren't so emotional."*

Brittney, saying sarcastically: *"Okay...sir, yes sir!"*

Bill: *"Brittney, you will not talk to me that way."*

Brittney: *"I'm sorry, but I don't agree with some of your values. Honestly, they are completely outdated. I was offered and accepted an internship this summer with a movement therapist practice in Dallas! I am applying for scholarships right now to cover the cost, but I am going, and you are going to have to find a way to accept that. Bill looks at Brittney, and with an expression of disappointment and says: "We are certainly going to continue this conversation, young lady, but now is not the time for us to have it." As Bill leaves the room, Brittney has a growing sense of discomfort over how she communicated some of her points but doesn't want to ignore that her dad needs to do better as well. She is not sure where to go from here, so looks for support and advice².*

If you want Brittney to talk to her best friend, Chloe, go to Friend Card #1

If you want Brittney to talk to her mom, Karen, go to Family Card #3

² This is an example of **taking responsibility**.

This is a more subtle example of the promise of taking responsibility in this scenario. Brittney has enough self-awareness to know she did not handle this conflict in a healthy way, and realizes she needs to take active steps towards improving the situation between her and her dad. Brittney also acknowledges that her dad needs to take more responsibility for how he makes her feel, but that cannot be achieved unless she is willing to speak to him without belittling his values. Bill also takes some responsibility here for de-escalating the conflict by practicing a boundary, but making it clear that they will come back to the conversation another time. While still unresolved, taking some time to reflect is usually the best approach when emotions are running high, and the conversation is moving in an unproductive direction.

Friend Card #1

Chloe and Brittney have been best friends for about a year. They immediately clicked and have been equally supportive of each other as they've navigated their sophomore year and pursued health-related majors.

Brittney texts Chloe: *"Hey C! Are you up? Need to chat. It's about my dad."*

Chloe realizes this will probably be a longer conversation, so she Facetimes Brittney:

Chloe: *"Hey Brit! Let me guess? Your dad didn't take the internship news so well?"*

Brittney: *"Chloe, I can't believe him! He doesn't care about my wants and desires, just what HE thinks is best. How can he dictate what I need?"*

Chloe: *"Yeah, your dad is straight up wrong about your major. You are doing so well in school. Doesn't he know you wouldn't choose to do all this work in dance science if you didn't have a plan for it?"*

Brittney: *"EXACTLY. He was so frustrating in the way he was just running our conversation in circles. So, I finally did it: I told him his values were sexist, old, and outdated. He needed to hear it! It should be my choice about what and who I want to be, not what he says or anyone else."*

Chloe: *"Girl, I get it. You want him to see things your way and he doesn't seem to want to listen to your point of view, so you feel like you need to get angrier to get your point across. Just with what you've told me about him, I think he confuses his guidance as your dad with controlling your decisions, and he needed to hear that. But insulting him? You and I both know that's not going to just make your dad see it your way."*³

Brittney: *"Yeah, I know. It just got worse from there. He just made me so mad! I don't like being unheard. Maybe I will go talk to my mom."*

Go to Family Card #3

³ This is an example of **taking responsibility**.

Chloe must lead Brittney to a bit of this realization, knowing that Brittney did have self-awareness of the consequences of her words & actions during the conversation with her dad. Brittney resolves to take Chloe's advice and talk with her mom about how & when to reapproach her dad.

Family Card #3

Brittney: "Mom, could we talk about dad?"

Karen: "Of course we can, honey. I've been meaning to talk to you about what happened this morning. How are you doing?"

Brittney: "Dad isn't listening to me. This is my education, my career, my life. I understand that he is trying to look out for me, but I would not have made the decision to major in dance without thinking it through."

Karen: "Maybe your father has a point. There is not a sure path to a career in dance science, at least...not that he and I really understand. Could you maybe change to a major he suggests and minor in dance? That way you still get the best of both worlds."

Brittney: "No! How can you just let him win like that? I understand he grew up with this way of thinking that what he says as "head of the household" just goes, but he doesn't always have to be right. I wouldn't have chosen Kinesiology as a major, gone through an audition to even get accepted to the dance science concentration, and look for internships and funding, if I didn't think I could be successful in it."

Karen: "Let's destress for a minute: take a few deep breaths with me. Okay, now please hear me out. I wasn't saying that your dad is right in this situation, but I am trying to suggest different ways of compromising. Tell me, what about this makes you so sure you want to major in it?"

Brittney: "Dance gives me joy and fulfillment. I don't want to work just to make money. I want to be happy while doing it. Dad sees just dance, but there is being an instructor at a studio, teaching dance at a school, working with professional teams, injury prevention and care. It's a science, which you and dad don't really see, and there are so many career paths I could take across the world."

Karen: "I admit, Brittney. We haven't really given you a fair chance to explain all of this to us. How about sharing something that shows him these different career paths?"⁴

Go to Family Card #4

Family Card #4

⁴ This is an example of **healthy conflict** and **taking responsibility**. The exchange between Brittney and her mom, Karen, demonstrates how to avoid argument through a few different healthy communication strategies: (1) clarifying misunderstandings, (2) asking for more information or the other person's point-of-view, (3) actively listening, and (4) taking responsibility: in this instance, Brittney takes responsibility for accusing her mother of taking sides, and Karen takes responsibility for the fact she and her husband, Bill, have been resistant to Brittney's major without having enough information to really be fair in their assessment.

Brittney rethinks her approach with her dad. She had done some research this semester about job opportunities, successful alumni who have chosen similar avenues, and why she chose Kinesiology with a concentration in dance science. She decides to print out the information and leave it on the dining room table for him to look through. The information highlights the following people:

“Kathy Quigley is an Aggie who majored in Dance. She teaches high school Algebra and works with numerous dance companies.

Brooke Griffin still serves as an Aggie today. She’s a Program Coordinator for the Dance program and has danced for the Brazos Dance Collective, Texas A&M University Dance Program, and Fade to Black Dance Ensemble.

Kali Johnson is a practitioner blending movement work with manual therapy. Her work is guided by her deep grasp of human anatomy and biomechanics. Kali is a proud Aggie with a B.S. in Kinesiology: Dance Science from Texas A&M University (2018). Research based education has led her to various opportunities in dance performance as well as scientific research.

Celina Smith is a Houston Texans Cheerleader who graduated from Texas A&M University.

Amy Liefer coaches the Aggie Dance Team and is a former Atlanta Falcons Cheerleader.”

Go to Family Card #5

Family Card #5

Bill sees the information that Brittney has left for him. He lets out a sigh and says to himself *“all right, let’s give this a look, shall we?”* Karen, seeing that Bill has decided to give the information a chance, comes over and sits with him.

Karen: *“She really is driven. It’s important you let her make her own decisions. If you keep forcing her to live your life – our lives – she will only grow further away from you and us as a family. That’s certainly not what’s healthy, and not what we want.”*

Bill: *“I realize all of this, Karen. She is just still so young and guided by her heart. She’s not rationally thinking about what comes after college. I don’t want her to fail or regret her decisions.”*

Karen: *“Did we not raise her to have respect for our family and for herself? It’s a balance, but you are largely seeing this from only your point of view which does not always match with hers. You want Brittney to respect you, but you also need to give that back to her. Bill: “I realize I have been hard on her and have misperceptions about her major. It’s not my intent to make her feel bad. I am trying to protect her. I know I need to eventually accept that she doesn’t always need that from me, or us.”⁵*

Karen leaves the table and swings by Brittney’s room: *“Honey, just wanted to let you know that your dad is looking through the information you left him. Maybe you should go talk with him.”*

Brittney takes that information from her mom and decides to restart the conversation with her dad: *“So dad.....what do you think?”*

Bill: *“Sweetie, I’m happy to see you did some research and this is certainly helpful. I admit that I was criticizing your choices without having a complete picture of this as a science. But I’m still skeptical. This is a small percentage of people. Have you considered what happens if you don’t make it in this career?”*

Brittney: *“Dad, please just stop! I have gone above and beyond to show you what I can do and what I can be capable of. Yet, you still have such little faith in my capabilities as a dancer. Maybe it was a mistake coming home. I think it best I leave tomorrow, and head back to campus.”*

Go to Family Card #6

Family Card #6

⁵ This is an example of **independence and taking responsibility**. In this dialogue, Bill and Karen acknowledge the importance of Brittney’s independence, with Karen underscoring the likely unhealthy outcome (pushing Brittney away from them and their family) of not honoring her choices as a grown woman. Bill also takes responsibility here, by looking at the information Brittney left for him and, importantly, by stating that he has been hard on her, being critical with very little information about what her major really entails.

Brittney: "Mom, I need to talk to you again. I listed out so many facts for dad to really learn about and understand why I love this major, and none of it worked. I got really upset and I insulted him. I know it wasn't right, but I need him, or you, or honestly both of you, to just accept this as part of my life already."

Karen: "Okay, let's sit down and I will do my best to listen and understand from your point of view."

Brittney: "Dad never listens to me. I just don't feel heard in this household, and it makes me feel like I don't belong."

Karen: "He loves you so much and all he wants is what is best for you. I know it doesn't appear that way right now, because you are angry at him and he keeps questioning your choice, but it is true. We know you are going to keep this major, Brittney. Even if he remains skeptical, he and I would never do anything to jeopardize it for you."⁶

Brittney: "I am not him, and the world is starting to change. Dance has taught me so much like how to be confident, elegant, strong, and creative. If I can learn this much from a dance teacher, imagine how much I can inspire other kids to do the same."⁷

Karen: "You know, I've never thought of your dance experience like that. I just thought it was something to help you stay active and have something to do. Thank you for sharing your experience with me. I think we could talk with your dad together. Would you like to try?"

Brittney: "Mom, YES PLEASE! I would love that."

Go to Family Card #7

Family Card #7

⁶ This is an example of **healthy conflict**. Karen agrees to fully listen to Brittney's perspective, and reinforces that although Bill has clear concerns about Brittney's major, they would never do anything to undermine Brittney's independence or choices. Karen is also solution-oriented, providing Brittney with a sense of support and allyship as they resolve to talk with Bill together.

⁷ This is an example of **independence**. Within this conversation, Brittney can freely express to her mom how she sees dance as empowering and influential. Her mom, Karen, accepts that her career goals and personal values are different than her own and from Bill's, and that they don't need to be present in every aspect of Brittney's life or decisions in order to show their care & concern for her.

Karen: “Bill, we need to sit and have a conversation about what has taken place. You both have said some hurtful things to one another and that is not what family should do. We can work through this together.”

Bill: “Okay, but first: can I show you both some career options I think are valuable?”

Brittney: “I appreciate that you are trying to help in your own way, but it’s not about the value you see, it’s about the value I see. I’ve tried to show you the many stable options available to me by majoring in dance. I can and will be successful.”

Bill: “Well, sweetie. I know you say we have some different values, but I see you have that strong Aggie spirit, so maybe you’re more like me than you care to think.”

Brittney: “I do take after you with my determination. I’ve already talked to a professor who said she would take me under her wing, mentor me, and help me succeed even after the internship this summer.”⁸

Bill: “I know I need to do better in honoring your wishes and abilities. I am still not convinced that focusing on dance is going to bring you all the things that I had hoped for you, but it’s unfair for me to put so much pressure on you to be just like me. Clearly from our conversations these last few days, I have some things to work on...”

Brittney: “I wanted you to understand that I felt disrespected, but I never should’ve insulted you. Just know that when you come into a discussion with that tone of “do what I say because I’m your father” it makes me feel like a I’m just a child, not the strong woman you wanted me to grow into.”

Bill: “I can meet you halfway. This must be your choice, and your mother and I – we will be there to support you. But no matter what success or challenges come from this career path, you must be the one to own the decision. We hope for your success, I just suppose I need to see more to believe in it being something worthwhile, and I am willing to do that.”

Brittney: “Okay, I can accept this for now. I would like to actually tell you more about this internship, maybe over some lunch?”

Bill and Karen take Brittney to lunch, and she shares more about the internship. It is the conversation she wishes she could have had with them, especially her dad, on that first day she arrived home, but despite the challenges in communication, she is glad that they could find a compromise that honors her independence. While Brittney knows her dad is still skeptical, the fact that they have agreed to move forward in this way makes Brittney feel more comfortable and confident in how she owns her decisions and how she talks about her aspirations.⁹

End of Scenario

Your scenario depicted a healthy relationship. The evidence-based characteristics were:

⁸ This is an example of **independence**. Brittney makes it clear to her parents that she has worked hard to make her own way through her major, and that she has developed professional relationships with experts in the field who are committed to her success. Bill and Karen do not object to Brittney working with this new mentor, nor do they indicate at any time that she should not or cannot accept her internship opportunity.

⁹ This is an example of **taking responsibility**. Bill takes responsibility for many of the unhealthy patterns he was using to communicate his disagreement with Brittney’s choices. This includes doubting her abilities and putting pressure on her to live out his values instead of her own. He also acknowledges that his values are not empowering to Brittney, and that many are rooted in a way of thinking that she finds to be misaligned with her generation. Brittney takes responsibility for the impact of her words on her dad, and vows practice better communication strategies during their future conversations.

1. **Healthy Conflict:** Openly and respectfully discussing issues and confronting disagreements non-judgmentally. Conflict is a normal and expected part of any relationship. Healthy conflict is recognizing the root issue and addressing it respectfully before it escalates into something bigger. No one should belittle or yell during an argument.
2. **Independence:** You have space to be yourself outside of the relationship. The other person should be supportive of your interests, goals, hobbies, and other relationships. The other person does not need to know or be involved in every part of your life.
3. **Taking Responsibility:** Owning your actions and words. You avoid placing blame and can admit when you make a mistake. You genuinely apologize when you've done something wrong and continually try to make positive changes to better the relationship. You can take ownership for the impact your words or behavior had, even if it wasn't your intention.

Where did each of these characteristics present in the path you took through the scenario? There might be one example or multiple examples of each characteristic.