



COLLEGE ADMISSION:

Helping Your Teen Deal with the Stresses of the College Admissions Process

The competition to get into college has become intense, and the admissions process can be stressful for some teens. The pressure on teens to get good grades or test scores can come from parents, school, and even peers. That pressure can lead to severe stress and can backfire, leading some young people to give up or pretend that they just don't care.



● HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEEN ABOUT THE PRESSURES THEY FEEL

- > **The Pressure:** *"If I don't get into the "right" college, I will disappoint everyone."*
 - **Your Response:** *"A parent's love is unconditional. Also, there is no "right" college. I want you to find the match where you will learn best."*
- > **The Pressure:** *"The college I go to will determine the rest of my life!"*
 - **Your Response:** *"Actually, how well you perform at your college, how well you work with people, and how well you take and use constructive feedback matters most to success."*
- > **The Pressure:** *"I will never get into a good college unless I am good at EVERYTHING."*
 - **Your Response:** *"The truth is that no one is good at everything. Successful people are really good at some things and not others. It is true that successful people try things that don't come naturally and learn to be comfortable when challenging themselves."*
- > **The Pressure:** *"The college admissions test will determine my life. I need to give up my present to prepare for the future."*
 - **Your Response:** *"No test determines your life. It is always worth studying hard because all of life will require hard work. But you also want to enjoy the present because otherwise you will grow to resent your work."*

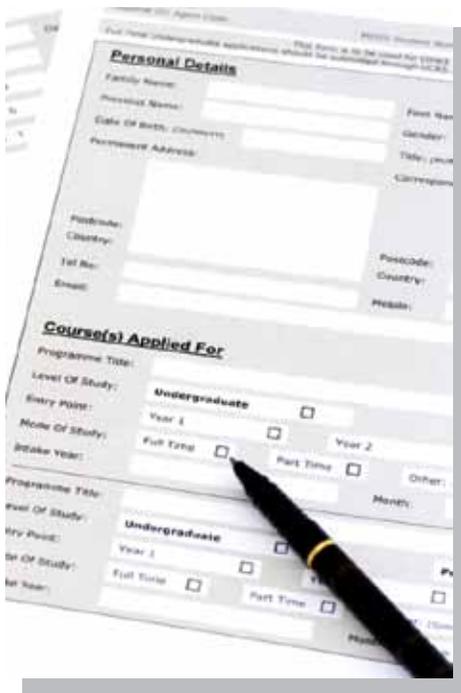
Parents' Role In The College Admissions Process

The college admissions process is an initiation rite into adulthood. That is why it is so important that teens do most of this on their own and that they learn to always be truthful. Remember, this process is all about your teen beginning to act like a young adult. Let her lead while you do your part. Understand that your teen needs to act independently but will still require your help with some decisions.

Remember that going to a "top tier" school does not guarantee happiness. It is more important for your teen to pick the right school for her.

● CHOOSING AMONG EDUCATION OPTIONS

- > Ask your teen about her future plans and be open-minded. What does she enjoy? What does she want to be? What options has she considered?
- > Will attending a 2- or 4-year college help your teen achieve her long-term goals?
- > Does your teen have a more specific interest or skill that would benefit from trade school?
- > Has your teen thought about joining the military? Or the ARMY Junior ROTC while in high school?
- > Check out the *Military Youth on the Move* for help thinking about these questions. Available at: <http://apps.mhf.dod.mil/pls/psgprod/f?p=MYOM:HOME:0>



● THE APPLICATION PROCESS

- > **Talk to your teen about how she plans to track her application deadlines.** Expect that she will think you are nagging her. Remember not to rush and push your solutions.
 - Help her come up with her own system after considering her current academic (exams, projects, papers) and after school (practice, meets, recitals, away games) responsibilities.
 - Introduce her to using automatic reminders via her cell phone calendar or email calendar to keep herself on track.
 - Let her know how setting reminders helps you be there for your child when she needs you.
 - > *“When you tell me about a soccer game you have coming up, I write it in my calendar. I also jot down a note to remind myself that I need to talk with your Aunt Debby to have her pick up Stephanie from her piano lesson that day. If I didn’t plan ahead, I would have to miss your games.”*
- > **Encourage your teen to be herself on her college applications.** She should be proud of what she has accomplished and of who she is. Remind your teen to always be truthful. Exaggerations or dishonesty will hurt her chances of being accepted.

- If you suggest that she “beef up” or “pad” her resume, she may think that you are not satisfied with who she is.
 - > If your teen has trouble seeing her strengths, help point them out. If your teen says, *“I don’t do anything”*. Remind her of all that she does do! Is she involved in any volunteer activities, sports, performing arts, or academic groups? Does she participate in church, community, or youth group organizations? Or maybe she has a job or helps take care of her younger siblings?

- > **If your teen has special needs or disabilities, suggest that she speak with her guidance counselor for advice.**
 - Reassure your teen that colleges accept qualified students with a variety of disabilities (physical disabilities, ADHD, learning disabilities).
 - By law, schools have to provide accommodations.
 - > Accommodations can include more time on tests, study skills classes, tutors, note-taking, one-on-one class aides and other services.
 - > Check out *Military HOMEFRONT* for more information about special education programs and policies. Available at: http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/portal/page/mhf/MHF/MHF_DETAIL_1?section_id=20.80.500.170.0.0.0.0.0.0¤t_id=20.80.500.170.500.120.32.0.0

● THE FINANCIAL AID PROCESS

- > **Sending your teen to college can be very expensive.** There are many resources that can help you afford a college education.
 - Help your child look into financial aid, scholarships, or grants.
 - > If you cannot afford to help pay for college, reassure your teen that many students take out loans and pay them back slowly after they graduate.
 - > Reassure your child that getting an education will help her get the job she wants, and that job will likely pay more than had she not attended college.
 - > Loans for education usually make good financial sense because graduates earn higher wages.
 - > Young people in some circumstances may be eligible for unique opportunities. Find out if your child qualifies for funding specifically for military kids.
 - > Check out *Military HOMEFRONT* for more information. Available at: http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/portal/page/mhf/MHF/MHF_HOME_1?section_id=20.40.500.144.0.0.0.0.0

● SUPPORTING YOUR TEEN THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS

> **Highlight your teen's strengths.** Let her know that she doesn't have to appear to be good at absolutely everything.

- *"I'm so proud of how you are maturing. Ever since you started volunteering at the animal shelter on the weekends, you have become more organized. Your grades have even gone up! You should be so proud of yourself for figuring out how to juggle everything. Being organized is going to help you in college and throughout life."*



> **Remind your teen about how you define success.**

- What matters most is that she finds the school that is *right* for her.
- Hard work, kindness, generosity, and compassion lead to success.
- Getting along with others and the ability to grow from constructive feedback are two other keys to real success.
- Praise effort rather than grades or results. This has been proven through research to lead to greater success.+

> **Help your teen plan how to best handle college rejections or being wait-listed.**

- Everyone will experience some rejection. Talk about how you will handle rejection. Some teens use humor, others change their expectations, and some will be very disappointed.
 - > *"I know you are upset and disappointed about not getting into one of your favorite schools, but I know you will get accepted to a college that will be right for you."*
- Remind your teen that the college admissions process can be unpredictable.
 - > *"The college admissions process is very random. If a college wants more students from the West Coast and you live in Tennessee, that's going to work against you. Unfortunately, that's the way college admissions go, especially because they often don't tell you why you weren't accepted. It is very frustrating but hang in there. You still have other colleges you are waiting to hear back from."*
- Encourage your teen to not bottle up her feelings.
 - > Let your teen talk about it as much as she wants to but respect that she might not want to talk about her emotions on your cue.
- Suggest that your teen not tell everybody her top choices.
 - > That will just make it harder for her if she does not get into one of them.
 - > Encourage her not to even select a "top choice" until she has received the acceptances.
 - > Share with him your experiences with how life works out the way it is supposed to, even though sometimes you only understand that when you are looking back.
 - *"You know I wanted to go to State University more than anything. I felt awful when I did not get accepted. So, I ended up going to Southern State University, where I met your mother. Just think where you'd be if I had gotten into my dream school!"*

Don't Let Stress Take Over

● TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN STRESS FIRST.*

> **Model acceptable behaviors when you feel stressed.** If you stay calm your teen will be better able to think clearly and do the tasks that are necessary.

● Help your teen learn to manage stress safely and effectively.

- > **Remind your teen** that the stress of applying to college or trade school will end – it's for a short period of time.
- > **Take breaks** from discussions about college applications and just have fun.

Be Aware of Signs that Stress has begun to Take a Toll on Your Child

When stress becomes too much to handle, we can all feel overwhelmed. If you notice any changes in your teen's behavior that worry you, contact your healthcare provider.

During the college admissions process your teen may find it tough to keep up with her busy life. She might not want to admit that she can't keep up or that she needs a break.

SIGNS THAT YOUR TEEN MIGHT BE FEELING OVERWHELMED INCLUDE:

- Letting her grades slip
- Adopting an "I just don't care" attitude
- Acting lazy because she is scared of failing

SIGNS THAT STRESS MIGHT BE GETTING TO YOUR TEEN INCLUDE:

- Sleep problems and/or nightmares
- Anger, irritability or outbursts
- Hopelessness
- Losing touch with friends
- Change in eating habits
- Missing school because of frequent headaches, dizziness, chest pain, or stomach pain
- Drug, alcohol or cigarette use

There are local supportive resources for parents and teens. In addition to talking with your child's healthcare provider, see your Child and Family Assistance Center (CAFAC) for help.

> Discuss creating a "Personal Stress Plan" with your teen.

- Help your teen to identify behaviors or activities that help relieve stress.
- Exercise can relieve tension and allow her to regain focus.
- Teach your teen to take "instant vacations."
- Reading a book, listening to music, or taking a warm bath will allow her to get away from it all.
- Make sure your teen has some time to unwind and recharge.
- Encourage your teen to maintain healthy habits, like keeping a regular sleep schedule and eating regular meals.

The college admissions process can be stressful and intense for your teen. Helping your teen navigate this process while being supportive of her independence can also be challenging. Remind your teen of her strengths and help her realize that her long-term goals are within reach at the right school for her.

SOURCES:

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