

# YOUR JOURNEY TO COLLEGE

## The Parent's Role In The College Application Process



It is a time filled with much excitement and anticipation, as your child is about to embark on the process of searching for colleges and applying to them as well. This is a time when your child's hard work and efforts are recognized and their dreams and goals are discussed. It is a time when they hope that their aspirations and goals will come to fruition. The parent plays a key role in this process. What you determine your role to be and how you conduct yourself in this process will be a factor in your child's success as well as a factor in your relationship with your child in the future.

Be cognizant of the fact that your child wants your input and support. They may look at you with a vacant expression and may not respond when you ask them questions about their future plans, but that is not an indication that they do not care or that they are not interested in your opinion. They may be overwhelmed with the process – this is very common. They may be feeling unsure of where to begin and may feel that they should know a lot more about where they want to apply and what they need to complete in regard to the application process than they currently do. They may also be unsure about attending college at all. It is not the right choice for all students. Make sure that you are not intentionally or unintentionally or giving your child the impression that they do not have a choice in this matter. They can take a year off to explore options or some students may be interested in vocational or nontraditional programs that may best meet their needs. College is not for everyone. Students also feel unsure when asked about a college major and think that they cannot apply to college unless they know what they want to major in. This is untrue and as the majority of students change their major one or two times, you can reassure them that they can choose colleges to apply to based on a variety of factors. The option to attend a two year community college is also a viable option for many students due to the cost factor, indecision about future plans or the desire to improve their grade point average, study skills and time management skills before heading off to a four year school. The decision about whether or not to live on campus should also be a topic of discussion. Again, living on campus is not the right decision for all students. Some students are not ready for this and may need a gradual transition into the college experience by living at home while first attending. Let your child lead in this area and do not let your fears get in the way of their choices. While it can be frightening to think about

allowing your child to live on campus, it can be an invaluable experience for them and can provide a gradual stepping-stone to independent living in the future.

Supporting your child throughout this process involves a great deal of patience, a sense of humor, and the ability to keep things in perspective. You can assist your child by providing them with college admission testing resources and preparation. You can help by being available to set up college visits. Although this process is time consuming, it benefits greatly in helping your child become motivated and excited about the process as walking around on campus makes the process become more real. College visits will help your child decide on factors that are of importance to them and this will help narrow down the choices. While visiting, do not persist on focusing on a school that you fall in love with (and wish you attended) if your child does not feel the same way. Remember that they will be the ones spending four years on the campus and the school has to be a match for their likes and desires. Your child can also use your assistance in monitoring deadlines. That being said, if you find yourself constantly reminding and nagging your child about deadlines that they are not moving towards meeting, it may be time to ease off and let them take charge of the process once they are aware of these dates. After all, they will need to navigate the college community next year and you will not be there to remind them of deadlines and dates. Now is the time for them to develop the level of independence that will be necessary for success in the future.

It is very important that you have a candid discussion with your child about the costs involved and how these costs will factor into the colleges they apply to. It is very disappointing for a student to apply to wonderful colleges and get accepted, only to find out that they cannot afford to attend. Have this discussion in the beginning of sophomore or junior year so your child will have a realistic picture of college costs and how this factors into their choices. Attending college is a privilege and as such, there are many viable options for students in the public university system in each state. These colleges range from non-competitive to highly selective levels and provide excellent college experiences and educations. It is not necessary to attend a very costly college to be successful in a career or to receive a good education. Have this discussion with your child early in the process so they are aware about what colleges may be realistic options for them.

You can assist your child by helping them choose schools in the “safety” and “match” categories. These are schools where they can reasonably expect to be accepted. Help your child by making sure they will receive some acceptances and will have options to choose from. You can determine which schools fit into these categories by researching the average G.P.A. (grade point average) and SAT/ACT scores for the colleges of interest and comparing them with the scores of your child. If your child’s scores are significantly above this range, the school may fit in the “safety” category. If your child fits within the range for their average student, the school may be a “match” for them.

The key to have a successful and less stressful college search and application process is to find a balance between the timeline of the process and the available time that your child has. It is important to be cognizant of the general timeline inherent in the process and schedule appointments to complete the material due. The parent should not be filling out the application(s) for their child. They should not be writing the college essay. They should provide resources if need be or offer suggestions, if asked. They should not be orchestrating the process. If they do so, it is likely to be recognized at the college level as admission counselors know the difference between the language, verse and tone of a seventeen-year-old essay versus that of an adult. Whenever possible, the student should be the one to contact with the Admission Office at the college to inquire about the process. It does not present a favorable impression when a parent continually calls the office for direction.

If you are in a situation where the stress level in your home is rising and tensions and tempers flare, request a time when you can sit down with your child to discuss the situation in a calm manner. Explain your intentions and communicate that you want the best for your child and are concerned about deadlines and choices. Have an open discussion of what the process entails in regard to the timeline, deadlines, expectations, campus visits and college costs. While you are there to provide support, there may be times when you have to retreat and give your child the space to complete this process on their own. After all, they will be considered an independent adult on the college campus next year and parental involvement in decision-making is not generally an option, nor is it recommended. Give your child the time and space to express their own concerns and fears. Listening, rather than talking, is the key. It is an exciting and yet stressful process for you and your child as well. Be there to support them and use this experience to strengthen your future relationship. Let them view your role as an ally and advocate; as a supporter rather than a director. This will do wonders to strengthen your relationship and will lead to the sharing of new adventures and experiences as you watch your child grow into an independent, capable adult who is taking the first step toward reaching their goals and dreams.

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