A Parent’s Role in the College Search and Application Process
How to Get the Most Out of Your Conversations Surrounding College

- Be a resource and not an adversary. Teenagers seem not to want you around—until you’re not there
- Clarify goals/expectations. Cooperation is much more fun than working thru conflicting agendas
- Listen a lot. Advice is cheap—understanding is priceless
- Talk to your child about his/her day. You may be surprised at what you learn.
- Work on problem-solving and goal-setting techniques. Prioritize pros / cons.
- Respect your child’s life. Change is scary. Ask for a regular get-together time and stick to it.
- Be positive and supportive. Self-fulfilling prophecies can have powerful consequences.
- Take and give “ownership”. Feeling a sense of responsibility is empowering.
- Be sensitive to how your words are perceived. Unintended put downs, care-taking, criticism, unsolicited advice, dismissive comments, anger, etc. are harmful
- Apologize when wrong. Kids like it when parents show their own human vulnerability.
- Parents, learn from remembering your own childhood experiences with adults.
- Allow your son or daughter to offer you respectful advice, suggestions, and feedback. It can be good for both of you.
- Be patient. Allow time for lessons to be learned. Don’t expect change overnight. Students don’t like admitting fault so provide an avenue for that to happen.
- Sometimes letting an outcome occur leads to natural or logical consequences that are more instructive than an emotional reprimand or unwanted advice.
- Develop workable rules and goals the family can “buy into” and share—and amend if needed.
- Remember that “we” are not going to college or taking the SAT or catching the winning touchdown. Our child deserves that recognition all by herself.
- The irony is that teenagers tell us they don’t want our help UNTIL we stop giving it.
- Hold your child be responsible and accountable for his/her actions. Teach personal responsibility. Reward good behavior.
- A student’s father and mother are the two most important male and female figures in his/her life. Appreciate the “unspoken bond” you share—even if your teenager may not often acknowledge it.

Helping Your Child Through the College Admissions Process

- Understand admission and financial—knowledge can reduce your feeling overcome
- Discuss your geographic concerns and financial limits up front. Show respect. Reduce confusion.
- Don’t limit college options based on cost. Significant financial aid may be offered.
- Discuss and schedule important deadlines in advance and post them for you and your child to use
- Nagging breeds resentment and can result in a war-of-wills that parents seldom win.
- Make comments, requests, and suggestions without emotion. Consequences are the greatest teacher. Let your child “own” the process. Encourage independence, but offer your support.
- Resist making college decisions for your child. “He/she” will be attending—not “you”.
- Allow your sense of humor to come out. The college process is stressful enough without timeouts.
- Be encouraging, gentle, and “present” during the college search and selection process. Understand that vacillation can be part of the decision-making process.
- Find a support group of senior parents. It can provide perspective, comfort, and insights for you.
- Don’t take things personally. Senior- and parent stress and anxiety make things hard enough.

**The Process of Letting Go**

- Plan in advance when and how communication will take place. That shows respect. Make your preferences known. Students will vary in the number of contacts with home.
- Collect, copy, review, and understand school documentation (acceptance- and award letters, deposits and receipts, class schedules, timeline information, orientation scheduling, policies, etc.)
- Keep an ongoing list of things your student will need at school. Check with faculty for book lists.
- Talk about plans and expectations in advance. Family personality may dictate how visible parents are when taking the student to campus. Be prepared for the “brush-off” as your child may be feeling her independence from home.
- Once on campus, allow your student to unpack alone with his roommates. You can go shopping.
- Purchase large items like TV’s, stereos, etc. once on campus to reduce shipping hassles. Inventory and purchase necessary toiletries and food where cheapest.
- Purchase clothing based on style recommendations and observations from students on campus.
- Limit credit card use. Decide on an allowance. Link reward to student performance.
- Maintain current contact information (like e-mail addresses of faculty, roommates, administrators)
- Clarify who is paying for what up front—even write it down as a “contract” of sorts
- Be aware that the first term in college is usually the roughest emotionally so help the transition by allowing “home sickness” to work itself out. Schedule a weekly or bi-weekly time to write or call.

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