

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Reducing The Stress Of That College Application

from the American Counseling Association

Yes, it's college application season, which means lots of stress for many teens and their parents. But taking the time, early in the application process, to consider and address the many questions and issues related to applying to college can help reduce those stress levels.

One important issue to address early is finances. College is expensive and for most families, this requires discussion and planning. You want to sit down with your student and realistically talk about how a college education will be paid for and what schools are affordable.

If there will be college loans, who will be paying them back? Are scholarships a possibility? Might the student consider a work-study program, or getting an on or off-campus job?

Remember to allow for room and food expenses if the college isn't local. Miscellaneous expenses can include that required math calculator and being able to socialize with friends. How often will there be trips home? Will the student need a new laptop or cell phone? Visiting the websites of colleges under consideration will provide a wealth of information on each school's costs and related expenses.

Stress can also be reduced by doing things early. Don't delay that ACT or SAT testing, especially if a retest might be needed. If you haven't already met with your child's high school guidance counselor, it should happen now. He or she can provide advice on college choices that would be appropriate to your student's grades, abilities and interests.

With answers to these questions, sit down with your student and help narrow down the list of possible schools. Now is the time to be realistic. If grades and test scores, or family finances, indicate almost no chance of an Ivy League school, take that off the list. Most students end up applying to multiple schools, usually 3 to 7, but it's also a good idea to include 1 or 2 "safety" schools where admission is almost certain.

Putting off the completion of college applications, getting the personal references needed, and writing that application essay that's required, will only increase stress and anxiety levels for the family.

Starting as early as possible, asking and answering the important questions, and getting help from your high school counselor will ensure that applying to college will be less stressful. But waiting for that admission office's answer? This remains high anxiety.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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