

How Can Parents Help With College Searches and Applications?

Do offer assistance with college visits and deadlines; don't write essays for the student, experts say.

More often than not, students aren't the only ones experiencing the college admissions process. Their parents are reminding them of important dates, researching schools, and in some cases, recounting their experiences when they were in the same position. This week, we received a question from Vanessa K. in Boise, Idaho, whose daughter is right in the middle of her applications:

Q: How can parents help their students with the college search and application process?

A1: Be a well-informed guide.

James Montoya, vice president of higher education, The College Board Parents who understand that they are not the ones applying for college admission are in the best position to guide their daughters and sons through a complex process. Open and honest conversations about college possibilities, especially any financial limitations or geographic restrictions, are best had early in the process. Parents shouldn't hesitate to go to the College Board Web site—www.collegeboard.org—for extremely helpful (and free) information on the college planning process and financing a college education. Such information will be helpful to those important "college" conversations around the dinner table.

[See *U.S. News's* [Applying to College](http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/applying) guide at <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/applying>.]

A2: Parents should be the biggest cheerleaders, but from the sidelines.

Katherine Cohen, founder and CEO, IvyWise and ApplyWise.com Parents naturally want to be involved in the college admissions process, especially if making a financial commitment. However, parents, "we" are not applying to college. Listen to your child. This is the most important thing: listening to what he/she wants from a college experience, instead of projecting your own aspirations.

DO: get to know the guidance counselor; help create a college checklist with deadlines; accompany your child on college visits, while taking a back seat and allowing him/her to ask questions; proofread applications; and encourage your child to do his/her personal best throughout.

DON'T: write the essays and over-edit applications. Your child's voice must shine through. Also, don't focus on one school or get defeated when your child does not get in, as it adds unnecessary

stress. If your child creates a balanced college list, he/she will get into a "good fit" college where she/he will be successful and happy.

[See [which questions to ask](http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/right-school/tours/articles/2010/04/02/questions-to-ask-on-college-campus-tours) while on a college visit at [http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/right-school/tours/articles/2010/04/02/questions-to-ask-on-college-campus-tours.](http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/right-school/tours/articles/2010/04/02/questions-to-ask-on-college-campus-tours)]

A3: Offer more support, less influence...

Michele Hernandez, president and founder, HernandezCollegeConsulting.com and ApplicationBootCamp.com Parents can lend a hand with bookkeeping/admin tasks to free up some of their student's time but should never attempt to write or add parental editing to their essays. The essays must sound authentic and be written in the voice of the student. That being said, parents can certainly lend a hand by organizing a college visit schedule, making a spreadsheet with interviews, tour and info sessions, making hard copy and electronic folders with essays for every college on the student's list so nothing falls through the cracks. Using a program like Excel is helpful since you can easily add deadlines, different policies, special info, and supplemental essay questions. Finally, parents can try to keep the stress level down by being realistic about college choices and not transferring their own expectations onto their children. The most important thing is to support your child's question for a school that is a good fit.

[Use the [U.S. News College Compass](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/store/college_compass.htm) at http://www.usnews.com/usnews/store/college_compass.htm to find a school that's a good fit.]

A4: Applying to college: use a balanced approach to parental involvement.

Steve Loflin, founder and CEO, National Society of Collegiate Scholars The college search and application process is an exciting and life-shaping experience that can sometimes be challenging for both students and parents. Students will likely need to submit financial documents when applying to college, for scholarships or financial aid, and parents can help make this a seamless process by having this information organized and prepared when the student is ready to submit his or her application. Additionally, parents can stay involved by occasionally asking for updates and checking in on application deadlines without excessive nagging. It's important to have a balance that allows the parent to stay involved while also maintaining enough distance to allow the student to choose the college that's right for him or her.

Source: U.S. News & World Report, August 17, 2011.