

The Top Ten Things that Parents Should Remember About the College Search Process

In September of last school year, high school counselors across the country received a letter from the Dean of Admissions of Middlebury College, a top liberal arts college in Vermont. The purpose of Dean Robert S. Claggett's letter was to highlight a concern they have with respect to the "increasingly active (and sometimes inappropriately so) role that parents have come to play in the college admissions process." Dean Claggett enclosed Middlebury's own "Top Ten Things that Parents Should Remember About the College Search Process." We've included this list for your review.

It is good, of course, that students and parents approach this process jointly, but we all know that at its best, the process itself can prepare students for the independence that they will experience in college. The following list contains some possible symptoms of parental over-involvement.

#10 Remember that this process is not about you. No matter how similar your children may be to you, they need to make their own decisions and observations.

#9 Support and encouragement are more appropriate than pressure and unsolicited advice.

Allow your children to seek you out and restrain yourself from imposing your viewpoint upon them.

#8 Do not use the words "we" or "our" when referring to your children's application process.

Those little pronouns are surefire indicators that you have become too involved.

#7 Help them prepare but let them perform.

Encourage them to sleep well and put thought into a college visit, but once on campus, step back and let them drive the experience. This is good practice for the next phase of their lives--- adulthood.

#6 Encourage your children to make their own college appointments, phone calls, and e-mails.

When a family arrives at an admissions office, it's important that the student approach the front desk, not the parents. We notice! Having control over those details gives them a sense of ownership. Don't be tempted by the excuse that "I'm just saving them time" or "they are too busy"—students will learn to appreciate all the steps it takes to make big things happen if they do them.

#5 Allow your children to ask the questions.

They have their own set of issues that are important to them.

#4 Prepare your children for disappointment.

For many students this is the first time they could face bad news. Remind them there is no perfect school and that admissions decisions do not reflect on their worth as people or your worth as parents.

#3 Never complete any portion of the college application – yes, even if it is just busy work.

That also goes for friends, siblings, counselors, and secretaries. For many colleges, that overstep would be viewed as a violation of the honor policy at the school.

#2 Do not let stereotypes or outdated information steer your children away from schools in which they would otherwise have an interest.

Times have changed and so have colleges.

And the #1 Thing for Parents to Remember about the College Search Process is:

#1 Never, ever, during a college visit buy a sweatshirt or t-shirt from the bookstore in your size --- it's a dead giveaway!