

# Ten Tips for Guiding Students Through the College Application Process

*Guiding teenagers through the college search process is a challenging dance: on one hand, you want to guide them; on the other, you want them to make their own choice. We offer the following suggestions to help parents and families whose children are considering Kenyon College.*

- 1. PROMOTE INDEPENDENCE.** Help your son or daughter\* practice being independent in high school. Urge them to make their own decisions regarding classes, money, clothing, friends, and lifestyle. Then let them realize the consequences of their decisions. This is difficult to do; no one wants a teenager to experience discomfort, pain, or failure. College, however, is full of decisions, and it's better for young people to practice making them while still in high school.
- 2. LET YOUR CHILD LEAD THE PROCESS.** Choosing a college is complex, and it's not easy for students to do it without some guidance. Allow your student to take the lead, but encourage them to turn to their parents, families, and counselors for direction—and adults should be ready to assist in whatever way they can.
- 3. CONNECT WITH GUIDANCE COUNSELORS.** Make an appointment to meet with your child and his or her secondary-school counselor. These professionals know colleges, and if they have the time (despite full portfolios), they also know your child. Their counsel can be invaluable!
- 4. GET ORGANIZED.** The college process includes tracking many dates—from registering for exams to scholarship deadlines. Is your child good at keeping track of deadlines? If so, you can take a hands-off approach. If, however, your child has a hard time managing multiple deadlines, you can assist by asking if he or she would appreciate assistance in the form of organizing materials or creating a chart.
- 5. PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW.** Interviews are not the grand inquisition that students expect. Help your son or daughter prepare by urging them to learn about the college and how it may fit their needs. Encourage them to develop insightful questions to ask the interviewer. Some students find it difficult to share their strengths and achievements, but talking about them in advance with families can be good practice.
- 6. MAKE IT THEIR CAMPUS VISIT.** When visiting colleges, try to tour the campus separately from your son or daughter. Allow your child to assess the college independently without managing your responses (or cringing at your questions!). Make sure it's your child's experience, not yours.
- 7. BE HONEST.** If you don't intend to support your child's attendance at a particular college, be clear early on in the process.
- 8. LET THE STUDENT COMPLETE THE APPLICATION AND THE ESSAY.** Completing the application is a learning process. So insist that your student fill it out independently and then check with you for suggestions. When applying online, urge your child to keep track of all passwords. Don't suggest your child exaggerate accomplishments on the application or in the essay; this creates the impression that you are not satisfied with his or her achievements. The application essay may be the first time your son or daughter has had to be this self-descriptive, so be generous with praise. (Pat yourself on the back, too, for parenting your child thus far.) Offer suggestions, but, above all, allow the final product to represent the authentic voice of your son or daughter.

\*Please note that while we are using the terms "son" and "daughter," we acknowledge that relatives, guardians, and friends frequently guide students through the college search process.

9. **TALK TO YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER ABOUT SOMETHING OTHER THAN COLLEGE.** Remember that the college-choice pressure weighs upon students, and it's helpful if you can direct their attention something other than college. Help them make their senior year an experience unto itself, not simply a precursor to college.
10. **ANTICIPATE A WILD RIDE.** College choice is an educational process, so prepare for a nonlinear journey. Initially, your child will probably evaluate colleges based on objective criteria—reputation, programs, curricular offerings, distance from home, and so forth. But when it comes time to make the final choice, emotions come into play. Remember that the college-choice journey is one of the heart as well as the head. Prepare for some nail-biting and anxious nights as decisions are made concerning where to apply and, finally, where to enroll.

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At Kenyon, we advise students to choose a school that will provide maximum (but manageable) challenge and, at the same time, will be a place that they love and where they feel at home. To know one's heart is difficult, and the chosen college must be in your child's heart. Your job is both to stand back and to run interference in order to keep your child from trying to please parents, family members, or peers with his or her selection.

## Suggested Reading

*Almost Grown: Launching Your Children from High School to College* (Norton, 1998), by Patricia Pasick

*I'm Going to College—Not You! Surviving the College Search with Your Child* (St. Martin's Press, 2010), edited by Jennifer Delahunty

*Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years* (HarperPerennial, 1997), by Karen Levin Coburn and Madge Lawrence Treeger

*When Your Kid Goes to College: A Parent's Survival Guide* (Avon, 1999), by Carol Barkin

*In Addition to Tuition: The Parents' Survival Guide to Freshman Year of College* (Checkmark Books, 1996), by M. E. Borden, M. A. Burlinson, and E. R. Kearns

*College Unranked: Ending the College Admissions Frenzy* (Harvard University Press, 2005), edited by Lloyd Thacker. Also see the Web site for Thacker's nonprofit organization committed to restoring educational values to the college admission process: [www.educationconservancy.org](http://www.educationconservancy.org)