

# Application Procrastination

If your kid's dragging their feet with college applications, you're not alone. These strategies can help keep them on track.

By Amy Paturel

Applying to college can feel like a full-time gig. Even if your child has stellar academics and standout extracurriculars, deciding which schools they want to apply to—and actually applying—requires a fair amount of heavy lifting.

Sharon Black's daughter, Delaney, is a prime example. "She works hard to get good grades, volunteers at every opportunity, and she's a first-rate soccer player. But when it comes to talking about schools, writing essays, and starting her applications, it's always 'I will,'" laments Sharon. "Deadlines are approaching, and it's like she is afraid to do it."

Delaney's reaction to college prep isn't uncommon. "With something as high stakes as college applications, the anxiety kids feel can be paralyzing," explains Katherine Reynolds Lewis, author of *The Good News About Bad Behavior*. "You know they need to own the process. At the same time, it feels beyond their abilities to manage it successfully."

## Getting it Done

Sharon put the onus on her daughter to

research colleges and begin the application process, but now she is stressing that it won't get done—or worse, she'll have to deal with the wrath of a hyper-stressed teen at deadline time. "It's her life, her college, her future, and yet, I want to make sure she does it—and does it right," says Sharon.

In the face of such a dilemma, many parents take over the entire process for fear their kid won't get their applications in on time and miss the boat for college. "Unfortunately, that approach usually backfires," says Wendie Lubic, M.A., a certified parent educator based in Washington, DC. Parents who pick up the slack during senior year set kids up for failure in college when the academic stakes and financial costs are much higher.

Approaching college conversations can feel like navigating relational landmines. Here are some tips from the experts on how parents can help their kids manage the college application process:

**1. Be part of the solution.** Manage your own fears and anxiety privately, away from your teens. "You don't need to say, 'This is so important.' 'You have

to focus.' 'This is the rest of your life,'" says Lewis. "They know that already." Instead, find like-minded parents with similar circumstances and vent your frustrations with them.

**2. Build a scaffold.** Start the planning process in advance with an overview calendar that highlights every deadline and task. Maybe it's a big wall calendar, or an Excel spreadsheet. It doesn't matter which format you use as long as it makes sense to your teen. Map out soft and hard deadlines for things like researching colleges, writing essays, and completing applications. "Then have a weekly — not daily — check-in with your child," suggests Lewis. "That gives you and your child space so you're not talking about it every single day."

**3. Get help.** Seeking outside assistance can take the heat off of an already fiery relationship between parent and teen. You may even find it helpful to hire a private consultant who can help your child stay on track with their college application process. Look for someone who is a member of an association or who is a certified educational planner. Or, lean on their guidance counselor at school to be the heavy on deadlines.

## Keep an Open Mind

Not every child is college bound or college bound now. If you have to push and prod your child every step of the way, you may discover they don't have the necessary skills to manage college life just yet.

"Some kids really need a gap year to gain some appreciation for what it takes to succeed at the college level," Lewis says. There are some terrific international and domestic programs. Some of these programs even offer college credits. "In the meantime, it's important for parents to have confidence that their kids will figure it out," says Lewis. "Even the most disorganized kids will find their way to that college diploma if that's what they really want." ●

