

TIPS FOR PARENTS: DOS AND DON'TS FOR HELPING YOUR SON THROUGH COLLEGE ADMISSION

The college search and admission process is a life-changing event for your son, and often for the whole family. The beginning of the college search process signals the beginning of a child's transition from teenager to young adult. As a result, it can be difficult for parents to strike the right balance of helping their son without taking over. Here are some dos and don'ts for parents entering the world of college admission.

DO learn about the process. Even if you have vivid memories of your own college decisions, realize that the college admission process had changed since you attended. Whether or not you attended college, invest some time in reading up about today's college admission.

DO discuss restrictions up front. If there are financial or geographic restrictions that limit the range of colleges your son can consider, discuss them with him at the beginning of the college search. Your son won't waste time and energy researching colleges that he won't be able to attend.

DON'T limit choices based on fees. "Parents should certainly be willing to lay out economic realities to their children at the front end of the college search process, but should not shut out options based solely on sticker price," says Michael E. Dessimoz, retired associate vice president for enrollment services at Roosevelt University (IL). Remember that financial aid often helps families send their children to even the most expensive colleges. No matter your income level, find out all you can about financial aid.

DO remind your son of deadlines. The life of a high school student is often very busy, and teenagers are still learning time management skills. Help your son begin keeping a calendar or daily planner to keep track of all of those colleges application deadlines.

DON'T nag. Remember, the goal is for your son to "own" the process, so that he can make the college decisions that are right for him.

DO listen and offer advice. For many students, their choice of college is their first adult decision—and it can be difficult. Likewise, it can be difficult for parents to find the right balance of guiding their son without making decisions for him. Try to act as a sounding board for your son; ask good questions and let him supply the answers.

DON'T make decisions for your son. Your son needs to choose a college based on his individual abilities, interests and personality. To that end, be aware of pressuring your son to apply to or enroll in the college you would like him to attend. After all, your son will be the one who spends several years living and learning at college.

DO be your son's cheerleader. The college admission process can be stressful. Your son may feel uncertain about the decisions he must make, fearful of rejection from colleges, or anxious about meeting deadlines. Over the course of the process, he may change his mind more than once about what he wants in a college. All of this is normal. Offer plenty of encouragement, a listening ear, and gentle guidance. And don't forget to celebrate each step along your son's journey from high school to college.