

## Reducing The Stress Of College Applications

from the American Counseling Association

Most teenagers find lots of ways to increase stress for themselves and their parents, but few things are as full of anxiety and stress as the college application process. And while there's no way to make applying for college stress-free, with advance planning the process can be much more manageable.

One starting point is to recognize that making an intelligent college choice takes time. Fall of the junior year of high school is the best time to begin the process. High school seniors should be well into college choices and applications by now.

Sitting down and having several honest family discussions about the costs of college and the family's ability to meet those costs is a great starting point. Is a scholarship possible? Are there savings that will be available? If there need to be loans, who will pay them back? Realistic financial discussions can help narrow the range of college possibilities.

This is also the time to look realistically at the student's academic abilities, performance and overall career interests. Take the PSAT, SAT or ACT test that most colleges require. What is your student's grade point average in high school and class rank? These are the measures that college admissions officers will be considering.

While it's fine to try one college that your student really wants, even though it might seem one with only a small chance of saying yes, it's more productive and less stressful to focus most of your efforts on schools that are a solid fit academically and financially. Talk to your high school counselor about what schools might be realistic choices for your student. Your high school counselor can also provide advice on applying for scholarships, loans and other types of financial aid.

You should also check out the various college guidebooks now available. They'll help identify college costs, admission requirements and give some ideas about how good a fit a particular college may be for your student. You'll also find that virtually every college maintains a website that will answer most of the questions someone would have about that school.

Yes, it's a lot of work and no, you still haven't completed the first college application. But starting early, planning realistically and investigating thoroughly will help to ensure that the right college choice is made. And it certainly will make the final college application process much less stressful for parents and students.

*Counseling Corner* is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)

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