

Are You Putting Too Much Pressure on Your Child during the College Admissions Process?

Red Flags for Parents

Research indicates that intense achievement pressure is generating high levels of stress and depression in many children, especially in affluent communities. As parents, we need to be mindful of whether we may be playing a part in this stress and depression. Here are some red flags to watch out for.

- During dinner conversation, do you talk only about your child's grades and college applications, forgetting to ask your child what he or she finds interesting and fun about school?
- When you meet with or contact your child's teacher, do you ask only about grades and test scores? Do you ever ask whether your child is a good friend to others and contributes to the classroom?
- Do you email or call your child's teacher about assignments or grades more than once a month, even when your child is not having any problems (e.g., trouble completing homework, absence due to illness, etc.)?
- Does your child sometimes not eat or sleep well because he or she is worried about not performing at a high level in school or about not getting work done that will result in high academic performance?
- Do you press your child to take certain courses or participate in extracurricular activities in which he or she has no interest and which are stressful for him/her for the sake of college applications?
- Do you encourage your child to do certain community service projects that they're not interested in because you think these projects will be especially helpful for their college application?
- Do you allow your child to exaggerate or lie about the extent of his or her community service because it will help him or her get into a prestigious college?
- Do you encourage your child to apply to selective high schools or colleges based primarily on prestige, without considering whether the school is a good fit for your child's personality and interests?

- Do you tend to see your child's peers as competition in the college application process – for example, telling your child not to let others know where he or she is applying to college because others might apply to the same school and that might hurt your child's chances of getting into that college?
- Do you commonly pressure your child to engage in substantial college preparation while they are on vacation –e.g. intensively studying vocabulary cards or math problems?
- Did you or do you plan to hire an SAT/ACT tutor or have your child take an SAT/ACT preparatory course before junior year of high school?
- Have you ever considered asking a doctor to diagnose your child with an attention deficit disorder (ADD or ADHD) specifically so that your child can petition for extended time on the SATs?
- When you visit colleges with your child, do you ask more questions than your child does on the tour or at the info session?
- If your child was not accepted at a selective high school or college, would you be embarrassed? Would it affect your self-esteem?
- If your child received a bad grade on a test or assignment, would you feel that you had failed as a parent?
- Do you find yourself thinking frequently about whether your child is performing at a high level or will be accepted at a high status college?

If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, it may be time to re-evaluate your priorities or take a serious look at the messages you may be inadvertently sending your child. Visit MakingCaringCommon.org to learn more about our Turning the Tide Initiative and for tips for dialing down achievement pressure and raising caring kids.