

### Parent versus Child

It happens in the best of families.

What is "it"? Tension between parents and children arising out of the college admissions process. This tension is definitely not one of the highlights of the process, but it exists, sometimes overtly and sometimes under the surface, and recognizing that it is present is the first step in dealing with it.

This tension manifests itself in many ways. There was the mother who asked her daughter to do her a favor, surprising the daughter by handing her a college brochure to read rather than asking her to clean her room. Another mother annoyed her child by reading college catalogues every afternoon just as the child arrived home from school. I have heard of a father who waited until his child had been admitted to his first-choice school to tell him that the family couldn't afford to send him. I have witnessed families argue in my presence, and I have had parents call me to find out where their son was applying because he wouldn't talk

to them. And the best story I've heard is about the student who spent a Sunday afternoon reading a book for pleasure to spite his mother after she pressed him to finish his application essays.

Some conflict between parents and children regarding college selection is perhaps inevitable. Most juniors and seniors think of themselves as adults, and want the freedom and responsibility that goes with adulthood, and yet unfortunately don't always demonstrate that responsibility. Most students take care of their responsibilities with regard to college selection and admission, but may not do it as fast as parents (particularly mothers) would like, and if other people are willing to call colleges, fill out test registrations, and type applications, they are perfectly willing to let them. In addition, one of the ways teenage boys attempt to control their parents is by controlling information, i.e. not telling them what they are thinking or doing with regard to college.



### Parents

The ultimate responsibility for college selection and admissions should rest with the student, as he or she is the one going to college. The college selection process is developmental in nature, with every student having his own internal clock, and until he is ready to face the decision there is only so much that you or anyone

can do. When he wakes up on a dreary Monday morning in October of his freshman year and asks himself, "How did I end up here?" you want his only answer to that question to be, "Because I chose it."

At the same time, you have a vested interest in this decision (given that you are probably footing the bill), and you have an important role to play. This process will be one of your final opportunities to exercise direct positive influence on your child's

### **Students**

The college selection and application process is a good measure of your readiness for college itself. If you are unwilling or unable to take responsibility for making the decision, that may be a sign that you are not ready for college.

Your parents' primary concern is your happiness and success. If you demonstrate that you are taking ownership for the decision by meeting

life. The process may be more stressful for your child than he/she may let on, so he/she needs your support, understanding, confidence, and advice (he/she may also need your nagging, but won't appreciate it). You should not hesitate to accompany your children on campus visits, particularly initial visits, but you may want to split up once on campus. If there are limitations on his college options, address those up front, and anything you can do to get him to articulate what

with your guidance counselor and giving the process the time and attention it deserves, even the most anxious parents will respect that. If, however, you don't demonstrate responsibility or communicate with them, they will be tempted to intervene.

Take advantage of your parents' wisdom and experience. Like Mark Twain, you may find that the older you get, the smarter they become.

he/she thinks and what he wants (okay, so this is optimistic advice) is desirable. Don't relieve him/her of responsibilities (registering for SATs, ordering applications, etc.) unless you can't help yourself, and don't hesitate to call the guidance office whenever you have a question or concern.

Above all, don't let the tension arising from this process become a point of contention that affects your relationship.

They're on your side as well as your back, so seek their input and advice. When you call home to ask for money (and you will), you want your parents to feel good about your choice of college.

By necessity, this process involves parents and students growing apart. That's healthy. Done right, it can also involve growing together, and starting a new, more mature relationship.