

Aggressive Competitor can also bring out the worst in you. Steer clear or you could find yourself bragging just to keep up or secretly hoping their senior hits a few roadblocks.

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TOP TIP

Parents, “we” are not applying to college. You will naturally want to be involved as your child goes through the college admissions process—especially if you plan on footing the bill! However, you must LISTEN to what your child wants from the college experience, instead of projecting your own aspirations. (Sorry, your frat party is over! And if you didn't get into your dream school, that doesn't mean your child needs to apply.)

*Dr. Katherine Cohen, College Admissions Expert,
CEO and Founder of IvyWise and ApplyWise.com*

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Chatter and Commercialism

For 17 years, you've reminded your kid how fabulous she is. She has the trophies and the ribbons to prove it. And now, everywhere you turn, someone or something is suggesting that, where college admission is concerned, she just might not be good enough. You can't turn on a morning show without seeing a feature on college competition, high rejection rates, and the astonishing accomplishments of high school seniors who are in the same applicant pool as your child. You're proud of her work at the food pantry, but how will she ever compete with the teen that fed a small country by raising millions of dollars via email? He even flew the food in by

obtain scholarship information from the guidance office, including local scholarships. Review the tips and guidelines for scholarships offered on www.fafsa.ed.gov, the government website for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Do not fall prey to scholarship scams. When you see red flags (like being charged to apply for a scholarship), run in the other direction.

Child Development

No, this isn't about developmental stages; it's about helping your child develop and organize a plan to showcase herself in an optimal and honest way. There are so many pieces to the puzzle. And it can require extra organization and effort if your child's college application requires a specialized portfolio (e.g., film and television, musical theatre, photography, sports). Parents who can help their teen stay organized will find the process less stressful. There are just two problems. Not all teens want the help. And not all parents know how to be helpful.

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TOP TIP

Be your child's biggest cheerleader and encourage him/her to do his/her personal best throughout. Get to know your child's guidance counselor. Help create a college checklist with deadlines. Accompany your child on college visits, while taking a back seat and allowing him/her to ask questions.

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insanity. Ironically, this lying fuels the insanity and compounds the problems.

Ghostwriting Won't Fly

For the last 17 years, most of us have been shaking our heads at how different we are from our kids. They don't act like us or reason like us. And yet, some parents think they can write their senior's essay and no one will notice. A 40-plus voice is very different from an 18-year-old voice. Admissions officers don't expect the polish of a university professor or successful litigator. Like parental intuition, admissions office intuition is sharp. As a former admissions committee member, I witnessed the secrets behind the essay. You don't need a magnifying glass to find hidden messages like, "I can't spell to save my life and I don't care enough to spell check" or "You are just my safety school." And the biggest loser, "Somebody else wrote this for me." A fantastic essay written by someone else will not cover up a bad transcript or poor test scores.

TOP TIP

Proofread your child's applications. Don't write the essays and over-edit applications—your child's voice must shine through. As much as you want to Thesaurus.com your child's essay, hold off; a college will instantly detect the voice of an over-eager 45-year-old!

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Disappointment

Not all letters bring the messages we want. Rejection doesn't feel good, and often parents feel worse than their seniors. It's much easier to help your child through the rejection experience if you've kept a balanced and logical approach to the college application process. Parents who have emphasized or encouraged the idea that there is only one perfect fit for their senior won't have an easy time. Seniors who have second and third choices they love are more resilient than those who are unable to picture themselves anywhere but one place.

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TOP TIP

Don't focus on one school or get defeated when your child does not get in, as it adds unnecessary stress. (So visit the safety schools on your child's list and get excited about them!) If your child creates a balanced college list, (s)he will get into a "good fit" college where (s)he'll be successful and happy.

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The majority of disappointed seniors quickly turn enthusiastic about another school. If I could say one thing to a devastated senior once he was ready to listen, it would be this: "I have never met a well adjusted adult who claimed a college rejection ruined his college experience or life success. Some have even claimed it to be a blessing in disguise."