

Creating a Sane, Healthy College Admissions Process with Your Teen: Conversation Starters

As a parent, you have a vital role to play in ensuring that the college admissions process reinforces important values and motivates your children to undertake activities that will allow them and others to thrive as adults.

The discussion guide below is intended to help parents and their children ensure that the college admissions process is meaningful and constructive.

These conversation starters are based in part on our report, [Turning the Tide: Inspiring Concern for Others and the Common Good Through College Admissions](#), which Making Caring Common developed in collaboration with the Education Conservancy. The report has been endorsed by more than 120 stakeholders in the college admissions process. It seeks to inspire in students greater concern for others and the common good, reduce excessive achievement pressure, and level the playing field for economically diverse students.

- 1) How will you choose which colleges to apply to? What is important to you in a college academically and socially? What values do you want your college to stand for? What other factors, such as location, are important to you? How will you know if a college is a good fit for you?
- 2) *(If you've already started researching colleges)* Which colleges have the programs, faculty, culture, location and philosophies that resonate with you?
- 3) What activities, experiences, or awards have been most significant to you during your high school career? Why were they significant?
- 4) Think about your most meaningful community engagement or service experiences thus far. How did you help others? How did others help you? What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about others, your community and/or society?
- 5) Have your high school experiences (service, coursework, extracurricular) increased your ability to care about and work with people who are different than you are? If so, how have they increased these abilities?
- 6) What courses have been the most significant in your high school career? Why? How did they challenge you? What did you learn?
- 7) Think about any substantial family responsibilities you took on during your time in high school (such as working to supplement family income or taking care of a family member). How did you learn or grow from those experiences?

- 8) Some students are very focused on achievement in high school—they might take a long list of advanced courses, take standardized tests repeatedly, or hire college admission coaches, etc. In your opinion, are there risks in this intense focus on achievement? If so, what are they?
- 9) *(If you've already drafted your college application)* Is your college application a unique reflection of your voice, personality, strengths, and interests? Are there parts of your application that feel more or less like “you”? How might you represent yourself more genuinely in the application?
- 10) How do you feel as you go through the college application process? What pressures do you feel and where do those pressures originate? What messages are you getting from me about the college admissions process?
- 11) How involved do you want me, your parent, to be in the college admissions process? What role would you like me to play?