



# Keeping Your Mental Health in Check During the College Application Process

William H. Stratton, M.Ed.

# Objectives

- ◆ To approach the college application process from a healthy perspective
- ◆ To discuss staying well when things go wrong and not according to plan
- ◆ To explore methods to remain positive throughout the application process
- ◆ To bring down the stress levels
- ◆ To push back against the culture of fear and dread surrounding the college search
- ◆ To remind students of the importance of self-care

On a scale of 1-10, how much pressure do you feel regarding your college search?



# Why is this process stressful?

- ◇ Year after year, stories of fear are passed down sometimes creating dread.
- ◇ Stories in the media about rejection.
- ◇ Students may feel inadequate or not good enough.
- ◇ This could be the first time students experience rejection.
- ◇ Social media adds fuel to the fire.
- ◇ Family dynamics will change.
- ◇ One cannot escape the fact that college is a huge transition.

So what should we do?

# Is the search student-centered?

- ◇ Much of the anxiety originates from comparing students to others.
- ◇ The college search process **should not be a competition** with:
  - ◇ Friends: You are your own person with a unique skillset.
  - ◇ Siblings: The process has changed significantly in the last few years.
  - ◇ Parents: The role of legacy does not always have influence.
  - ◇ Relatives and family friends: Decide how much you want to share.

# Focus on Fit

- ◇ There are thousands of colleges and universities in the United States.
- ◇ Fit = Will I be happy as a person living on this campus for four years?
- ◇ Thriving is different from surviving.
- ◇ Genuine happiness will likely lead to academic success.
- ◇ Academic success will lead to a successful and fulfilling life beyond college.
- ◇ Fit is not a product of rankings, prestige, etc.
- ◇ Just because you have not heard of a school does not mean it's inadequate.
- ◇ Think beyond the bumper sticker!



# Getting Organized

- ◆ Create a college email address and the student should check it daily.
- ◆ Read and follow instructions on college applications and next steps after acceptances.
- ◆ Make a list and keep track of important deadlines.
- ◆ Manage the “small details” daily to prevent stress on the day applications are due.
- ◆ Applying to college is a marathon, not a sprint.



# Admissions Decisions

- ◆ Remember, decide ahead of time how much information you want to share.
- ◆ If social media causes anxiety, consider limiting usage or taking a break.
- ◆ When receiving news of a deferral or denial, please understand it is not personal even though it feels deeply personal.
- ◆ A deferral or denial is an opportunity to explore other institutions. Focus on fit.
- ◆ When good news arrives, be gracious and remember others might not have been admitted. This is true for “likely” schools as well.

# The Financial Conversation

- ◆ To prevent a difficult conversation late in the process, parents and students should discuss the financial reality early.
- ◆ The key is not to limit choices prior to receiving financial aid packages and scholarships, but to agree upon when to move to another option later in the process if financially an institution is not a good fit after receiving (or not receiving) aid.
- ◆ When in doubt, apply widely to institutions of varying degrees of selectivity.
- ◆ Private institutions and public institutions in another state could surprise you with an attractive financial offer.
- ◆ Scholarships and aid packages are released after admissions decisions.

# Self-Care

- ◆ Decide when you are *not* going to discuss college in your household.
- ◆ Enjoy your senior year of high school; when it's over it's over.
- ◆ Discuss the changing family dynamic:
  - ◆ Who will be responsible for various aspects of the process? Hint: students should take the lead and be reaching out to college reps with questions.
- ◆ Don't forget self-care; start forming healthy habits prior to college:
  - ◆ Sleep, balanced diet, exercise, etc.



# Utilize Resources

- ◆ You are not on your own!
  - ◆ High school counseling staff
  - ◆ College reps
  - ◆ Online resources
  - ◆ College visits



# Conclusion

- ◆ 1. Ensure the process is truly student-centered. Block out the noise.
- ◆ 2. Focus on fit. Will the student be happy on a daily basis and *thrive*?
- ◆ 3. Get organized, follow instructions, and remember deadlines.
- ◆ 4. Embrace difficult moments, be gracious when it all comes together, and don't let college consume you 24/7.
- ◆ 5. Practice self-care: your health is life or death, college admissions is not.



# YOUR ADMISSIONS REPRESENTATIVE

---



**WILL STRATTON**

Greater Washington, DC

803.603.3666

[strattw@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:strattw@mailbox.sc.edu)