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Chapter 15: Advice and Encouragement for Families

The college admission process has real potential as a learning experience; it gives your child the opportunity to make decisions and develop a valuable sense of responsibility, autonomy, confidence, and more, if they're allowed the flexibility and support to take ownership over it. Discuss any of your concerns up front, but remember that you are not the one going to college—it's your child taking this important step toward responsible adulthood. Keep in mind that the key word here is encourage, not push.

For many parents, guardians, and caretakers, there is great temptation to step in and do many things for your student during the college admission process. As best you can, resist the urge to take over or micromanage as a way to ease your own stress or anxiety about this process. Particularly during the fall of their senior year, carve out dedicated, standing time each week to check in about your student's progress. This makes your family conversations about college intentional, focused, and mutually consensual, and avoids the tension that often comes with unexpected or rapid-fire check-ins with your student.

Open, honest communication between you and your student is critical. As you see them through the college admission process, try to:

- Always keep your student, their criteria, and their perspective at the center of the process
- Urge your child to apply to the schools that offer the best fit and remind them regularly that college admission decisions are never a reflection of their self worth
- Recognize and celebrate the individual nature of this process; there is no one-size-fits-all approach
- Model openness to and curiosity about the new and unfamiliar

- Preserve their self-esteem, confidence, and responsibility
- Encourage autonomy and ownership by helping them build strong organization and communication systems
- Support your student in creating and maintaining appropriate boundaries when it comes to sharing about their process
- Celebrate all milestones and acceptances
- Discuss college finances early, often, and openly
- Be mindful about using social media to share admissions news or to comment on others' news
- Pose questions and seek support from experienced professionals, such as your student's counselor, rather than relying on word-of-mouth or common misconceptions

The college admission process can be stressful. Your student may feel uncertain about the decisions they must make, fearful of rejection from colleges, or anxious about meeting deadlines for their college applications and school work. Over the course of the search process, they may change their mind (more than once) about their career aspirations, academic goals, or what they want in a college. All of this is normal. The best thing you can provide as one of their primary support systems is unconditional reassurance and regular reminders that where they go to college matters far less than what they choose to do and who they hope to become once they get there.

