

## The Parental Overinvolvement Quiz

It's only natural for parents to be part of their child's college selection and application process: You're paying for it, after all, and this is a climactic moment in your offspring's life. It's also one of the visible results of primary and secondary education.

But this American walkabout often suffers from too much parental involvement. They see this moment as theirs instead of their children's, or in the name of "helping" or "preventing mistakes" they take over, situations that can cause a great deal of conflict and ill will as a child heads into the future. Anyone who has been through it knows the signs: increased mumbling and eye rolling, dark looks, eruptions at the dinner table, and a refusal even to say the word "college" or fill out applications.

But there are ways to tell if you're doing too much and need to back off. Ask yourself:

- Do you say, "We're applying to college" instead of "Johnny's applying to college"?
- Do you insist that your child apply to your alma mater or other college of your choice regardless of his/her interest in it?
- Do you look forward to telling friends at cocktail parties where your child is applying?
- Do you know more than your child's college counselor does, even if you haven't applied or been to a college in 20 years?
- When you have college conversations with your child do you talk more than listen?
- Do you (or a surrogate) do all the college research, all the calling, and all the typing of request letters and applications?
- Do you make admission interview appointments for your child?
- Do you worry that you haven't done enough as a parent to ensure that your child gets into a "good" college?
- Do you see college as a reward for your efforts at raising a child?
- Have you read all the college guides, getting-into-college guides, secrets-of-getting-into -college guides, and "how to" books about essays, tests, and everything else?

If you've answered "Yes" to any of these questions, it's time to pull back and take stock because you're taking control of something that should belong to your child. Allowing him or her to take the driver's seat in the college process is like, well, letting him or her take the driver's seat.

Naturally, you need to keep an eye on things, but stay in the passenger's seat; don't try to grab the wheel. Make suggestions, keep the nagging to once or twice a week, and remember that, overall, the college process is actually a lot more forgiving than driver's ed. Be resolute and insist that your child do the work. In the long run, this will be much better for your child's development and your long-term relationship.

Remember, it's your child's future at stake here, not yours. Give him or her the power to make decisions, even to make mistakes, with your support and guidance, not your direction or judgment. Above all, parents, enjoy this moment of watching your child begin the process of becoming an independent, well-adjusted adult. You'll be glad you did.