

## CHAPTER 14: TIPS FOR PARENTS AND ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

### HOW TO DEAL WITH AREAS OF STRESS FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

In this chapter I am going to discuss a number of areas that many students and parents experience difficulties with:

- How to avoid the **SAT panic** experienced by students noticeably in October and November of their senior year.
- Tips for students dealing with **deferrals, wait lists, or rejections** from colleges.
- How to **appeal a rejection** from a college.
- Information for **parents** including what to do and not do in terms of how to helping your student through this process.
- How to help students and parents **cope with** the increasing **stress** that high school seniors experience as they journey through this college admissions process.
- How to make the college admission process **rewarding and successful**.

**First, let's discuss the SAT panic.** Years ago while I was at Duke I remember that there were hundreds of classmates of mine with SAT scores of 1500 and higher - It was the old SAT & 1600 was the top score - yet some of these intelligent students, and not just a few, didn't study. They thought they did not have to. Maybe they thought they could coast through college. They had a rude awakening when they flunked out. I learned this lesson from them: **Success in college depends on how hard you work.**

Let me reiterate: scoring well on the SAT does not guarantee success **in** college. It does not even guarantee getting into your top-choice for college. As mentioned earlier in this book, if you were on an admissions committee and had to choose between two people and could not take both, do you choose Candidate #1 with a mediocre GPA, 2.5 on a 4.0 scale, and a rather high SAT score, or Candidate #2 with a GPA of 3.5 + and an average SAT score? Well, I know that I would choose the student who worked hard for four years in the classroom as demonstrated by his or her GPA versus someone who scored well on a four-hour standardized test one Saturday morning.

My advice to you is to study and practice-practice-practice for the SAT and/or ACT. Review your vocabulary and really get to know the words. Become acquainted with the SAT and ACT style of math questions. Polish your essay skills. Then just step in there and take the test. Once you have your result, take the test again, both tests if you are taking them both. **Be sure to retake whichever one you do better on.** Why? Well, there are a couple of reasons: 1) Chances are really high that you will score significantly better, and 2) colleges will use your highest score in considering your application even if they are given all your scores.

**Do your best.** That's all anybody can ask of you. It is all you can expect of yourself. Hang on to this thought: you are not your SAT or your ACT score. Above all, don't play the "numbers game" by comparing your scores with family, friends, or anyone else.

(Source: *SAT Panic Causes Thousands of High School Seniors to Flee* by Dave Berry, College Confidential, link: [www.collegeconfidential.com/SAT\\_panic](http://www.collegeconfidential.com/SAT_panic))

Comparing SAT/ACT scores is like comparing IQ scores, they're personal and do not reflect the whole person by any stretch of the imagination. They really don't need to be disclosed. I know of students who fabricated high SAT/ACT scores to share with their friends so as not to feel inferior. Yes it is human nature to want to compare, and you probably will share your scores with your friends, but to allow your score to define you, to let it be a measure of yourself-worth is not only senseless but also erroneous. Unfortunately, in today's highly competitive world, this is an easy trap to fall into. Everything we do whether it is sports, education, a career, whatever, is measured and ranked. That is fine, I guess, but those rankings have nothing to do with true success and happiness – these are measured by what we find, or don't find, within ourselves.

### **Sons of privilege need love, too, Harvard study shows: Connie Schultz** By [Connie Schultz/Plain Dealer Columnist](#)

**Sunday June 07, 2009, 12:31 AM**

One question has nipped at the heels of this state school graduate for nearly 30 years: How would I be different if I had been one of the privileged of the Ivy League?

As a Yale graduate told me just last week at his 35th reunion, "I walked on to this campus thinking the world was my oyster, and I was never given any evidence to the contrary."

I smiled at this stranger and thought such rarefied beginnings must surely build an archway to an even rarer happiness in life. Right?

A study at Harvard suggests the answer is sometimes yes, but usually no. College has little to do with how you feel about your life at 50, and privilege means only that you start out lucky. Happiness may hinge not on how well-known we are, but rather on how well anyone knows us at all. That's a gateway policed only by us, and woe to those who refuse ever to loosen the locks to the love that can save them.

For 72 years, Harvard researchers have followed 268 men who started out there as the best of the best, even by Harvard standards. Every aspect of their being -- from drinking habits and physical activity to the height of their optimism and the length of their scrotums -- was gauged and recorded as they leaned head-first into the sweeping winds of change.

Through war and career, marriage and parenthood, divorce and aging, they were regularly examined and prodded to gauge the trajectory of their lives and the state of their minds.

The greatest indicator of happiness may be our ability to sustain connections with others, writes the study's director, George Vaillant. "It is social aptitude, not intellectual brilliance or parental social class, that leads to successful aging."

Consider this snippet from a recent interview with the 74-year-old Vaillant, who was asked what he had learned from the Grant Study men: "That the only thing that really matters in life are your relationships to other people." In a video interview, he insisted, "Happiness is love. Full stop."

In the end, these men proved to be just as humbled by life as everyone else.

And just as it is for everyone else, happiness was most likely to come to those willing to unlock the gate and let love rush in.

To see this full article visit [cleveland.com/schultz](http://cleveland.com/schultz). Connie Schultz is a nationally syndicated columnist for The Plain Dealer and Creators Syndicate. She won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary for what the judges called her "pungent columns that provided a voice for the underdog and the underprivileged." It is a common theme in her work.

As mentioned earlier [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org) lists 700 to 800 colleges that do not require an SAT or ACT score. Colleges are being added every year to this list as more and more schools are going with the holistic approach to judge applicants in their entirety, not merely by a test score. The College Board now has made available the **Score Choice™ option**, as of March 2009, which allows **you** to report or not report whichever scores you want. This may take some pressure off of students as well. By using this option, if it will make you feel better; instead of trusting a college to look at all of your scores and pick out the best ones, you can do that. Colleges will not see your lower scores.

#### The New SAT Score-Reporting Policy

Designed to reduce student stress and improve the test-day experience, Score Choice is a new score-reporting feature that gives students the option to choose the SAT scores by test date and SAT Subject Test scores by individual test that they send to colleges, in accordance with each institution's individual score-use practice. This allows students to put their best foot forward on test day by giving them more flexibility in score reporting. Score Choice is optional, and if students choose not to use it, all scores will be sent automatically.

Colleges continue to set their own score-use practices, which may vary from college to college. Different colleges use test scores in different ways and a "one size fits all" approach to college admissions does not reflect the diverse needs of colleges and universities. The College Board is enabling participating colleges to display their SAT score-use practices directly to students on collegeboard.com. This information is presented at the time that students are asked to send scores.

Students are encouraged to follow the score-reporting requirements of each college to which they apply, but their scores are not released for admission purposes without their specific consent. Colleges and universities will only receive the scores that students send them.

Go to <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/sat-reasoning/scores/policy> to see all the details of Score Choice™. (Source: The College Board)

Colleges are looking for your best numbers, so don't be afraid to send test scores, the Score Choice™ option is completely that, optional. If it is something that will help you by reducing stress, then do it. It is a pre-option, that is, you must subscribe to it **before** taking the tests.

#### **What I want is for you to do is make the following vows to yourself about the SAT and ACT test-taking process:**

- ✓ I am going to approach the SAT or ACT and see them not as a necessary evil but as problem-solving instruments in this whole college admission process.

- ✓ I do recognize that the test in no way reflects my self-worth.
- ✓ I know that the SAT does not necessarily measure what I know, have learned, or have failed to learn.
- ✓ I will keep in perspective that I am much more than my SAT or ACT score.
- ✓ I shall prepare for these tests.
- ✓ I will do **my** best.
- ✓ I know that I can take the tests as many times as I want or need.

As mentioned earlier, SAT stands for **Scholastic Aptitude Test**, not Scholastic Achievement Test. The test does not exactly measure what you have learned but rather, how well you take a standardized test. That is, your test-taking skills, and the best way to sharpen these skills is how? That's right: practice - practice – practice!

### **TIPS FOR PARENTS**

Now for some tips for you parents, how you can help, and how you might hinder your child's journey to college. This whole college planning-search-admissions process can be difficult at best and horrendous at worst. It consumes time like you just won't believe. The forms, the decisions, the tests, the choices, the unfamiliar words and terms, the questions, the answers, the meetings, the interviews, the self-searching all come together in one apprehensive process. These are taken from my notes, observations, and the *NACAC Steps to College* © 2002.

**Be patient.** Patience does help because it all is a process, it doesn't get done overnight, if you've done the homework suggested in earlier chapters, searched and prepared per my guidance, and if you do what I suggest in this chapter, **you will have an edge** and this process will be one of the most rewarding and beneficial achievements your family ever experiences.

**Be the parent.** Learn as a parent, even if you think you know it all, that times have changed since you went to college. Catch up with those changes. The requirements we had to get into college are not the same as today's standards. Read the resource books that I list in Chapter 12.

**“For parents, applying to college is a balancing act like no other.  
You may need to be involved and invested in the process  
- kind of a constructive nag -  
and you may be paying for it!  
But in the end, your son or daughter has to own the process.”  
-Jim Miller  
Dean of Admissions at Bowdoin College**

As the parent you do have to continue to guide your child through this process. My goal is to instill the confidence you need to be the best guide. There is no magic formula for this and it is not genetic. It merely takes a commitment on your part of time and effort. And please remember, I am here to help.

“We always have parents who open the decision letters while their child is still at school. They call and ask, ‘What am I going to tell him when he gets home? He’ll be just devastated.’ We always reply, ‘Well, you might want to start by explaining why you’re opening his mail.’”

—Nancy McDuff, *admissions director at the University of Georgia*  
 (Source: Kathleen Kingsbury, The Daily Beast, *College Admissions Hell* 03/04/2009)

There is a sad but frequent tendency for parents to over- involve themselves with their child’s college admission process. Some parents use aggressive tactics - repeated phone calls to admissions officers, references to “our” application, name-dropping of influential friends, and even threats of various types. Many baby boomers live vicariously through their children. Of course, to a degree this is just human nature. While we can only dream of a high school-college “do-over” for ourselves, we can try to guide our children so as to, in a way, do it all over again for us. To make a choice now that we wish we had made years ago. To become someone or something we wish we had become. Is this entirely fair to our children? Sure, they should get as much advice as we can give, but what decisions are truly theirs to make? They will make mistakes, we all did, but that is a part of growing up. Be there for them when they fall just as you have always been. Give comfort when comfort is needed. Help them to become their own person. In other words, love them.

“The parents’ calls this week seem worse than in the past,” says one admissions officer at a top-tier Midwestern University. I can’t tell you how many lives I’ve been told I ruined. One dad called me Satan – and his daughter got waitlisted! Another mother offered to volunteer in our office for a full year if we reconsidered her daughter’s rejection. Another threatened my tires!” (Source: Kathleen Kingsbury in *College Admissions Hell* reported on The Daily Beast 04/03/09)

As a final note, trust that the values you have instilled in your children strongly influence the decisions they make. You can only do your best in raising kids. Do not ask for more than that of yourself.

### **DON’T BE A BADGERING PARENT**

I remember working with parents of the type who never had time for their children while growing up and now are trying to make it all OK by getting them into a top-tier school. To these parents it does not matter that the school they chose fits their child whatsoever. Or whether the child wants to go there. These parents panic when met with rejection by admissions officers or snags in the admissions process, and feel a need to control everything within the process themselves. Personal sales pitches for their child, an approach of pure intimidation, or scare tactics (“I’m not giving to the Alumni fund unless.....”) will often backfire. Admissions staff members now more than ever are voicing and implementing their resentment against badgering parents.

### **DO NOT BE TOO CONTROLLING**

Parents should not fill out applications for their sons and daughters. Yes, help by reminding them of deadlines. Students are very busy and deadlines are very important. Try not to be too much in control, at least as much as possible. It is imperative to strike a balance between you the parent and your son or daughter throughout this process.

Be a good sounding board. Let your student ask questions and be prepared to give advice. As a parent, ask good questions, but only appropriate ones, ones that will delve into what is best for your child or help him or her develop their own concepts. Guide, don't push.

Your son or daughter is the one who has to be happy here. This is a different ballgame now - as much as you have been in control through the years in deciding where to send your son or daughter to grade school, high school, or to which summer camp, now is the time for your child to be the primary decision-maker. In no way am I saying that the child has absolute control over this process/decision. I am saying that they are now growing up, they should know what direction they want to go, at least a general direction, and like it or not, you should let them follow a path they choose, with your help and support.

So try not to nag. I know, you want to say, "Kids these days just don't have the same sense of urgency we had when..." but hold on. Say what you have to say ("You need to get signed up for that test by the 12<sup>th</sup>!") and move on to other discussions. You have helped your best through the years and now it's important to help your best here. It may be time that your son or daughter lives and learns. You can only do so much as a parent.

**By the way, sweets don't work** "We always have people bringing us cookies and cakes. It's terrible for my waistline and it doesn't work. One young woman sent a box of red and gray M&Ms, some stamped with her name, some with 'Wants UGA.' They're still on my desk, but I don't even remember her name... We did let her into our January class, but she was not too pleased about that. Her mother called to complain." — *Nancy McDuff, director of admissions at the University of Georgia* (Source: Kathleen Kingsbury, *The Daily Beast*, *Dirty Secrets of College Waitlists* 03/30/09)

### **Keep two goals in mind.**

1. Which school is best for your son or daughter.
2. Help your son or daughter develop ownership of this whole process so that he or she can make an educated, informed, best decision about the college to attend.

**Do this – be encouraging, downsize your stress, and especially reduce your child's stress.** Students change their mind often about college choices, majors, goals, their careers, and this is all normal. So lend an ear and be supportive of their final choice, even if it is the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>-or 5<sup>th</sup> "final" choice.

I have always believed that things happen for a reason. Try to keep things open for you and for your child. Try not to base choices only on fees and cost. Sure it costs to retake tests and we all have limits, but plan for something beyond the bare minimum. It

certainly is important to discuss limitations up front, whether they are geographic, financial, or whatever. I was blessed to have parents with limited income and yet they did not restrict my choices. It made all the difference in the world. This may or may not be possible for you to do at this point so you must have several affordable, reasonable choices in mind. Keep abreast of financial-aid options, mentioned in Chapter 11, no matter what your income level and especially if your family's financial situation has changed recently.

### **HOW TO DEAL WITH WAIT LISTS, DEFERRALS, OR REJECTIONS**

First let me discuss the ramifications of wait lists and deferrals letters. Wait list decisions and early decision/early admissions deferrals are not a death sentence. It does not mean that you are in or out. Early decision/early admissions students who have applied as late as November 1<sup>st</sup> find out in mid-December whether or not they have been accepted, rejected, or deferred into the regular applicant pool. Thus they have to then wait until April 1<sup>st</sup> to find out if they have been accepted. Yes it is a grueling kind of waiting period for some early admission/early decision applicants. You may have to submit your intent to enroll at another college in the meantime. So the question is how badly do you want to go there? I will give you some tips about this in a minute.

Barmak Nassarian spelled out the problem:

“It [has gotten] got harder to separate the very committed from the applicants just window-shopping,” Barmak Nassirian, associate executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. “Schools hedged their bets by upping the number of applicants they put on the waitlist.”  
(Source: Kathleen Kingsbury, the Daily Beast, *Dirty Secrets of College Waitlists* 03/30/09)

### **WAIT LISTS**

Wait-listed applicants, on the other hand, are not deferrals from the regular applicant pool but they are students who are just that, wait-listed. It can vary, but typically applications must be in by January-February for regular admittance consideration. On April 1<sup>st</sup> letters go out accepting, rejecting, or wait-listing applicants. If one is notified of being placed on the wait list their application is neither accepted nor rejected, it is on a wait-list. It could be called “wait-and-see” list because it means the college may still accept you if enough regular admits decide to not enroll and space in the class then opens up. The regular admits must let the colleges know of their decisions by May 1<sup>st</sup>. Wait-listers do get in, not all of them, but a number of them do get in when the regular admits decline the colleges' acceptance. First of all, colleges need to make sure that their incoming class quotas and limitations have been met. A college can accommodate just so many incoming students. They do not want more and they do not want less. So if you are wait-listed at the college of your heart's desire, you need just to wait it out.

**But don't count on the waitlist** “I can't stress this enough to families: Put a deposit in at some school before May 1. Yes, more and more are willing to walk away from that

money if a better offer comes in, but we hear terrible stories all the time about kids who ended up with nowhere to go in the fall.” — *Brian Hazlett, director of recruitment at Binghamton University* (Source: Kathleen Kingsbury, The Daily Beast, *Dirty Secrets of College Waitlists* 03/30/09)

Yes, there are some things you can do while you are waiting it out. ***College Admissions: Dealing with Deferrals and Waitlists*** By Dave Barry (College Confidential © 2001-2009 Hobsons, Inc. - All rights reserved) See the entire article at [www.collegeconfidential.com](http://www.collegeconfidential.com).

1) Your best strategy could be to find a real human being in the admissions office at the colleges that you are applying to, someone who you can connect with. Not that you can nag or badger but someone that you can build a rapport with and keep updated with current information about you and your accomplishments and latest awards or grades. Interpersonal skill is vital to do this successfully. My tips are to seek this real human being in admissions, politely introduce yourself, state that you are wait-listed, and ask if you can periodically keep this person updated on yourself. Do not be pushy, aggressive, or annoying.

2) Work with your counselor. Your counselor may know someone at this college and speak with them on your behalf. Or your counselor may not know anyone at this college but still contact them and keep you at the forefront of consideration for acceptances from the wait list.

3) Get a recommendation update from your counselor or someone who knows you well. You don't want to overkill with recommendations but at this stage I would say go ahead. Make good choices, though; have a pastor, an alumnus, a relative, or an employer write a strong letter that sets you apart from the others. Earlier recommendations may or may not have done that. Again, at this stage go for it.

Some tips from admission officers from an article by Kathleen Kingsbury, the Daily Beast, *Dirty Secrets of College Waitlists* 03/30/09:

**Be persistent** “Write the school, call, follow up, update your grades and send an extra teacher recommendation letter. Let them know it's your first choice and where else you got in. You can't just sit around and wait for a miracle.” — *Michele Hernandez, former admissions officer at Dartmouth College and author of A is Admissions: The Insider's Guide to Getting into the Ivy League and Other Top Colleges*

**But don't pester** “I had one mother last year who called me every single day for two months, sometimes multiple times a day. She couldn't help herself. I finally had to say, ‘Your son is not getting in and you may wish to seek psychiatric help for yourself.’” — Ivy League admissions officer

**Follow the rules** “We tell students: Send additional academic information only. Still, students will send us seven additional recommendations, email us endlessly or have

everyone they know call us. It doesn't help. We know the affluent students from Long Island and California will fly here to tell how much they want to come, but we want a level playing field for the northwestern Indiana students who don't have the gas money in their pocket to visit." — *Terry Knaus, senior associate director of admissions at Indiana University at Bloomington*

## REJECTION LETTERS

Keep in perspective that it is not a judgment letter against your character. Maybe it's just that there are not enough spaces to take all of the great applicants that applied this year, including you. There is life after rejection. Move on. Keep a positive attitude. Do not feel dislike or disdain for that school. Remember that when one door closes, another one opens. Some of the following information came from *Dealing With Rejection* by Dave Berry, college Confidential © 2009, but it is mainly from my personal notes.

Here is a great bit of advice: **Get psyched about where you did get in** "For day one, I tell kids to be excited about the schools they did get into. They applied to those schools for some reason in the first place, and that school thought they'd be a good fit. It also puts you in a better bargaining position if another offer does come around." — *Brad MacGowan, college counselor at Massachusetts' Newton North High School* (Source: Kathleen Kingsbury, The Daily Beast, *Dirty Secrets of College Waitlists* 03/30/09)

One year at Brophy College Prep a young Navajo student was accepted to Stanford. I was his counselor at the time. He experienced some difficulties, both personally and academically, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarters of his senior year. Stanford subsequently rejected him based on his grades and lack of performance and asked if there were any extenuating circumstances they should know about. As his counselor, I wrote an extensive letter detailing the rough personal experiences that were happening within his family. Stanford then turned around and did admit him and the young man did go on and graduate from Stanford. So a rejection letter is not always a death sentence either.

You may want to consider the other end of the rainbow. Students have been rejected and thought that it was the end for them; they failed to see other side of the situation. Look beyond the dark clouds – is there a silver lining? One young man I remember could not imagine going anywhere else but to his top choice school. Reluctantly he went to another school and found out that not only does life go on, but that it was better than he could have hoped. He loved his college, was extremely happy at how things worked out, and in retrospect cannot imagine why he was so hung up on his one top college choice in the first place. Things happen for a reason.

When appealing a rejection it is okay to call the college and ask if all the facts that are in your folder are current and up to date. Did the school receive your mid-year grades? Does it contain your latest SAT or ACT scores? Do they have your additional letters of recommendation? This kind of follow-up is not considered an intrusion, badgering, or annoying. Colleges will respond in a favorable manor to your call. Admissions offices know that mistakes happen. Once here in Phoenix a counselor that I know mailed

pertinent documents to a college of a student in his file of application by mistakenly placing them in a mailbox marked “metered mail” instead of “stamped mail”. The box ended up in Hawaii before being delivered to the Midwestern College some two weeks after the college application deadline. A rejection letter was sent. Clarification of the matter via a phone call by the counselor put the applicant back into the admissions consideration category. He was accepted.

Admissions appeals require additional information and when that additional information is received students can be and will be admitted. Remember, through it all the job of college admissions officers is to fill the freshman class. However, as mentioned earlier, it is a buyers market. Colleges can't afford to have empty seats in the classroom. They must consider, “If we accept the student will the student accept us?”

Yes, wait-list students do have to sweat out that time period and you really should not count on an institution coming through in the end and accepting you from the wait-list. If it happens, great, but if it doesn't happen you need to make sure that you have other choices. Another way to consider the rejection letter is: It's their loss. I have told a few students that in years past. I also told them that the lucky school is the one they chose to attend. There is life after rejection.

As the economy continues to spiral downward, admissions officers say they have little sense of what to expect in terms of waitlist activity over the next two months. From year-to-year admissions the accepted applicants who do not enroll can baffle departments. Several factors made the admissions cycle volatile: the high school class of 2008 numbered nearly 3.4 million, the largest in U.S. history; there was a swell of kids submitting eight or more college applications; and Princeton, the University of Virginia and Harvard got rid of early admissions. Add in the precarious economy, and dozens of colleges overestimated their “yield”— the percentage of admitted students who ultimately enrolled. Schools had to promote more people from their waitlists than ever before. (Source: Kathleen Kingsbury, The daily Beast, *Dirty Secrets of College Waitlists* 03/30/09)

### **SENIOR STRESS AND TRANSITIONING TO COLLEGE**

Both students and their parents have to deal with senior stress and the transition to college life with its myriad challenges. I vividly remember my senior year in high school - like it was yesterday - for many reasons, personally, socially, academically, and athletically. Many of us have recollections of that time in our lives - positive and negative. Our subsequent high school and college reunions testify to the attitudes of such times in our lives whether they were good, bad or ugly. The stress that high school seniors experience is like no other stress that they have had in their life.

I have seen personally the affects of that stress over the years. Again, I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. There are the meltdowns, the rebellions, the withdrawal into a world of drugs and alcohol, the loss of interest in school activities, and the resulting lower grades. Worst of all, I have witnessed the loss of interest in everything else that used to matter – family, friends, and loved ones.

But then again there is the finding of one's self, the catapulting of self-confidence because of an award, an accomplishment, or a score on an SAT or ACT. There is the sharing of joy at a momentous achievement that rejuvenated not just the soul of the achiever, but those surrounding that person and touched by it. Early in my high school counseling career I worked one-on-one and in group counseling sessions with many varied students, from the dropout oriented to the student body leaders, from job-bound students to college-oriented students. I noticed that when those students were together in a group-counseling environment there were many similarities that came out and that were recognized by both the dropout oriented and the college oriented and discussed by the students themselves. I used to have what were called student-advisor groups, an experimental thing, where the student leaders would be in a group with dropout-oriented students. The idea was to help motivate the potential dropouts, who were felt to be at-risk of not finishing high school, by having the student leaders share positive experiences. In turn, the at-risk kids spoke about their experiences. Some of the findings that I discovered are these. (Source: Stress Points in the College Transition by R. Fred Zuker in The College Board Review Winter 1997-98)

- All high school seniors have many experiences in common.
- They want to be loved and yet left alone.
- They want you to “treat them like an adult but I’ll pout when I want to”.
- Many have increased anxiety about their looks and grades, test scores, achievements, future opportunities, when they compare themselves to others around them.
- Seniors want their needs met now.
- They want mom and dad to pay for all the incidental experiences that go along with college preparations, including prepping for tests and other senior year expenses- pictures, year book, college applications fees, prom fees.
- Many become more and more obsessed about possessions, the best clothes, cars, latest electronics, iPods, mp3s, and Facebook.

I have seen Facebook become such an obsession with students recording movies, songs, and putting pictures out on their site and keeping up with a hundreds or thousands of “friends”. I wonder when they find time to study let alone experience all that goes along with being a senior - camaraderie, clubs, sports, work, community service, and actual time with friends. Facebook can drown out and overshadow students’ real school and personal lives. It can promote students, but only as superficial people with a “Look at me, I’m real but I’m not.” kind of attitude. “See what I have written, see my video, hear my song, I am so cool.” Really?

Much of this is typical of senior year egocentricity and can be considered more or less normal. And now it’s the “twittering”. What next? The point here is sometimes priorities disappear and lo and behold the additional stress of college applications deadlines, essays, and college decision-making compound the senior year picture, big time. Seniors push the limits of curfews, dating patterns, and responsibilities at home. They miss appointments made for them by their parents. Students who without any

consideration or conscience cancel an appointment, without notice. The lack of common courtesy simply astounds me.

Now it all catches up, the senior is on overload, he or she shows up at my office for tutoring or college counseling looking like a zombie due to disturbed sleep patterns, weight gain or loss, substance abuse, or depression. Seniors have decisions that have to be made, such as do I take AP English 4 or do I do regular English 4 or Honors English 4, knowing that colleges want to see a rigorous course curriculum on the student's transcript. This can be a tough decision to make. There's the senior baseball player needing to be at practice and all the games and still needing to do SAT and ACT prep and also meet other school obligations as well. Choices have to be made. There are only so many hours in the day.

I see these students every day. Many of them are stressed out. They make me tired just looking at them. Then there are those students who fail to meet deadlines because of their overloaded life or just plain neglect. Yes, you can pay a late fee for the SAT and ACT if you miss the test registration deadline but there is no such late fee for college applications deadlines.

Be alert if you as a parent notice some change in your child's behavior or any other signs of a deeper problem become apparent. Or if you, the student, start to feel overwhelmed, out of control with the college process, buried by schoolwork, if you find yourself unable to sleep, experience weight gain or loss, feel nervous and on edge much of the time, or if you begin to look for some substance to help overcome all of these feelings, talk with your counselor and parents.

Parents, try to discuss your observations with your child. Teachers, counselors, friends, talk to these kids. Little problems can escalate to big problems fast. See if you can decrease scheduled activities.

Students, cut back if necessary on activities, appointments, and commitments. The ever-increasing pressure can best be dealt with if you have less on your plate. The extra sleep, relaxation, free time (and I don't mean Facebook) can help put things back into perspective. This is supposed to be the best time of your life, don't waste it.

Reference: Some material about senior stress is from R. Fred Zucker, *Stress Points in the College Transition* from The College Board Review: Winter 1997-98.

### **MAJOR STRESS TIMES FOR JUNIORS AND SENIORS**

I have found that major stress times occur for juniors between March and June. This is standardized test preparation time. For seniors the greatest time of stress is between September and January, the time for taking tests and the deadlines for submitting applications. It is a "given" that the wait for colleges to release their decisions on April 1<sup>st</sup> is highly stressful, as is the following April-May period when the student has to make

a final college choice. If you think about it the most probable stressful year in a young person's life is from March of their junior year through April-May of their senior year. Just when all other personal crises seem to occur - sexual identity, athletics, academics, and home issues need to be dealt with - the college admissions crisis kicks in.

Let's not forget the **senioritis** factor. I have witnessed this every year as a teacher and a counselor. I mentioned earlier the story of the young man who was accepted early to Stanford, had numerous crises in his life, Stanford rescinded their acceptance, and he was finally admitted after I made a detailed rationale for his senior problems. It is not a guarantee that if you are accepted early that you will, in fact, be admitted. Successful completion of senior year courses with satisfactory grades is important.

To conclude, how do students and their parents cope with the extra stress of senior year? **Consider time management and stress management strategies** for all in the family who are involved. **Try not to overload**, be balanced. **Try not to worry and never compare** yourself to others. Accept this process and growing period as a right of passage and opportunity into adulthood. And learn to adjust.

**Embrace everything great about senior year, enjoy it.** Appreciate the help from your parents, teachers and counselors who are trying to help you, not hinder you. Be grateful that you have opportunities. **Dream big and make it happen.**

The following is a message to students that I recorded in February 2008 called Life Lessons. I recorded it for students in my SAT and ACT prep class as part of our last class together. I hope you find some tips and advice worthwhile and helpful.

## LIFE LESSONS

Hi, this is Ken, and I've been trying to think of a way that I can finally motivate you as you are preparing to take your tests. I am here at the office on Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup>, Friday night and thoughts abound. I'd like to share some of these thoughts with you.

It is going to be 36 years now since I graduated from Duke and I have spent all that time in business and education. Most of you do not know much about me but I am going to give you a glimpse of my life and some advice. Life Lessons. I do not know all the answers. But I do know some of the questions that you are going to have to answer and face in your life.

**Do your best.** Nobody can ask anymore than that in whatever it is that you attempt. You are going to do better on the test than if you did no prepping at all. Believe that.

**Set goals.** I am taking the test for the first time and I will get a score such as XXX. Or I took it already and got XXX score, so I am going to take it again and improve and do better on it by XXX number of points. Set a goal.

My father instilled that in me when I was very young, “Ken, set a goal. You will come closer to that goal if you set one than if you don’t.” So - when I was in high school I had coaches that reinforced that. It wasn’t enough to do just OK, it was always **excellence** we were expected to do and show. One of my football coaches was also my track coach. I threw the discus, as some of you may know. My father said to set a goal. So I decided to set my goal at 190 feet (my high school’s discus record at that time was 154 feet and had stood for over 10 years). With the help of Coach Bob Reublin I threw the discus 187’3” – didn’t reach the goal but was good enough to set the school record which still stands today some 40 years later.

Set a goal.

**Don’t be a “what iffer”. Take a risk.** Take risks in life. Don’t be one of those people who say I wonder what would have happened if I had applied to Stanford. Or Notre Dame. One year when I was working as a counselor at Brophy College Prep School, in Phoenix, we had 20 kids apply to Notre Dame. Ten were accepted. Which was a lot out of 20. But one young man was not accepted who we all thought would be accepted. He had done very well in high school. AIAs, Student Athlete of the Year, Student Council president, NHS president, 4.0 GPA, but he did not get in; someone else did get in that we didn’t think would. So all of a sudden other kids were wondering, “Well if he got in, I wonder if I would have gotten in?”

Don’t be a “what iffer”. Take a risk.

**Don’t compare yourself to other people**, because that will guarantee that if you do, you will be miserable your whole life. **Believe in yourself.** I had a parent tell me once, “Well, Ken, you tutored my older son and now I have a another son coming up, but he isn’t anything like his older brother.” I said to her, “GOOD! Be glad that they are not the same. If everyone were the same the world would be a dull place.”

Parents should not compare siblings. Teachers should not compare students. Student-peers should not compare themselves to other student-peers. So if someone tells you they got a 2000 on the SAT and you think, well, I only got a 1700, SO WHAT!?! You are NOT your SAT or ACT score, good OR bad!

My dad always told me, “Ken, there will always be those people in life who will do better than you – maybe - but not BE better than you.” I am grateful to him for telling me that. I believe that. An older lady once told me, “I am better than nobody, and nobody is better than I.”

I am better than nobody, and nobody is better than I. What wisdom.

Yes, there will be those people who do better than you did on your SAT or ACT, or live in a bigger house, or have more expensive cars, or have more opportunities than you. But they are not better than you.

Don't let anybody tell you that you can't do something. **Most importantly, don't tell yourself that you can't do something.**

So: Do your best. Set goals. Take risks. Do not be a "what iffer." Don't worry about what other people say, or think, or do.

**Most importantly, be yourself.** Don't pretend to be someone you are not. Don't feign affection. Don't kiss-up, or down. Treat others like you want to be treated. Be yourself.

Years ago I went to San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf, and I saw in a wax museum, a wax exhibit, that I never forgot. It was a scene showing a very old, forlorn, sad-looking man lying on a psychiatrist's couch. The psychiatrist was nearby and the caption on the wall read: "You need to get out more, you need to laugh more, go see Grimaldi the Clown. He'll make you laugh." The caption underneath said, "But doctor, I AM Grimaldi the Clown."

Here he was laughing on the outside, crying on the inside. Pretending to be someone he was not. There is a maxim I learned during my graduate work in counseling psychology. It goes like this: **The greater the persona, the greater the mask.** That means, the more people put up a front, the more they are hiding behind a mask.

I have enjoyed working with young people all these years because although they may not know who they are yet, they are still learning, but they do know who they are not. While many adults I have worked with through the years still do not know who they are, but act like they do by pretending to be somebody they are not.

Be yourself.

**Persevere.** Again, don't let anybody tell you that you can't do something. I have worn hearing aids since I was 5 years old. Without them I am 90% deaf. I read lips. I have never made excuses for my difficulty. I have accepted my limitations. I have encountered many people in my life who have far greater limitations than I, and admire them. There's no self-pity here. If anything, my difficulty has motivated me to be determined to be treated like everybody else. I learned to adjust. When life hands you a lemon, make lemonade. Certainly I am thankful for the technology that has enabled me to hear and not be in a capacity of not being able to communicate which would mean not being able to have learned all these years, but also to have not been able to teach.

When you are feeling sorry for yourself, and we all do, think about what it is that you DO have and be thankful. Don't complain about what it is you don't have - be thankful for your gifts and talents. My father used to say, "We complain because we have no shoes until we meet the man who has no feet."

Persevere.

**Develop healthy outlets for your frustrations, your anger.** Go run a couple miles; beat up on a tree, or whatever it takes to get it out of you. For me it was throwing the discus.

I would go to the stadium near my house and throw, and throw, and throw - seven days a week. As a freshman in high school, I was terrible at this. My teammates would scatter whenever I stepped up to throw, as none of them knew in which direction I was going to throw the discus. I didn't know either. This event requires one to stand in a circle, gather momentum, and throw the discus into a designated, triangular area, for the throw to be inbounds. My freshman throws did not go far and often were way out-of-bounds! But I persevered, practiced, set my goals, and became better. My senior year I finished 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation in a national track meet that was held in Sacramento, California; I lived in Ohio at the time. Another very good coach, Gene Kidwell, coached me, again. Now do you think that I was happy by finishing sixth? No. I felt like I had let a lot of people down. That I didn't measure up.

It cost a lot of money to go from Ohio to California in 1968. My parents were poor. My dad made at most \$10,000 a year as an accountant. Our family owned a small, hole-in-the-wall Italian restaurant where we had weeks of \$100 revenue. We were poor. It was tough. I would not have been able to go to Duke if it were not for a football scholarship. In any case, the guilt kicked in. I did not do as well as I thought I should do. I wasn't happy with my performance.

The next day after that track meet, my dad gave me a poem. He said, "Here, Ken, read this every day."

The Man In The Glass

When you get what you want,  
in your struggle for self  
and the world crowns you king for a day,  
just go to the mirror and see for your self  
what that man has to say.

For it isn't your brother or mother or wife  
upon who judgment you must pass.  
The fellow whose verdict counts most in your life  
is the one staring back from the glass.

Credit: *The Guy in the Glass* by Peter "Dale"  
Wimbrow, Sr., circa 1934.

He gave me this poem on a 3x3" newspaper clipping. I taped it to my mirror my senior year summer. I had it with me all four years at Duke, taped to the mirror in my dorm room. I read it everyday. Finally, one day, I did not have to read it anymore because I finally believed it. I was 23 years old. I was a personnel manager of a corporation in charged of hiring, and firing at times, over 3000 people.

There was a particular issue I did not agree with the company vice president about. Personnel policy. There was an employee who wanted to transfer from one department to another, which was not allowed under the existing policy. I felt the policy in place was archaic.

This employee was in a position to not be able to transfer, but worse, be subjected to retaliation and possibly being fired.

So I fired off a four-page memo to my boss. I said in it that the policy was a violation of civil rights, the equal opportunity employment act, it is an unfair labor practice, and we need to change this. In any case, I waited for a response to that four-page memo and I did not hear back from him. I went to his office one day and said, "Mr. Mears, did you have a chance to read my memo yet?"

He said, "Yeah, I read your memo, but you're not going to change anything around here."

I said, "Mr. Mears, I quit."

He could not believe it. He was totally up in arms. He said, "You can't quit now, we are in the middle of our busy season. You can't do this!"

"Mr. Mears," I said, "I quit.

I will train whoever you want me to train to be your next personnel manager, and then I'm out of here." And I did just that, trained my successor, then I went on to graduate school, got my Masters degree, and spent the next 34 years in education.

That day I felt good. I stood up for what I believed. I did not have to read that poem anymore. That was July 1973.

*Believe in yourself.*

**Be a friend.** I believe angels are here on earth and are our friends. To help us. To make us laugh. To be at our side in times of difficulty.

Grant that I may not seek to be consoled as much as to console.  
That I may not seek to be understood, as much as to understand.  
That I may not seek to be loved as much as to love.

*Be a friend.*

**Be balanced. Don't overload yourself. Don't overstress or over-stretch yourself.**

You know I am always amazed when I see the kids that come here to my office, for the last 10 years now, I wonder how they do it, how they do all that they do. They make me tired just looking at them. And yes, they are tired, they are over-tired and over-stressed.

Relax. Relax, kids, and take time for yourself, you deserve it. Being well rounded doesn't mean being overwhelmed or overloaded or overstressed. Do what you can do, you can't do it all and you don't need to do it all. Be balanced.

You can please all the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot please all of the people all of the time.

I need to share with you something important. It is about the dangers of comparing. Several years ago I had in my math class a young man named Eddy, a junior, a popular kid, a good athlete, and a really good kid. He had a younger brother named Robert, a freshman I did not know. Their dad was a very hard man. Dad used to compare Eddy and Robert. In dad's eyes, Robert could never measure up to do or be what Eddy was. I think That Robert started to believe that, too. One day Robert went into their backyard, to a shed, went in, closed the door, and wrote on the door in blood: "Eddy, I love you. "

Then he hung himself. Fourteen years old. I remember at the funeral Eddy leaning on the hearse, looking inside at his brother's casket with that numb look, with that blank stare, with that look of shock.

I went over to Eddy, put my arm around him and said, "Eddy, it's not your fault. It's not your fault."

It was a sad day that I will never forget. I learned then about the dangers of comparing.

I have a poem in my office that goes back to my Duke days titled "Desiderata" and there are a couple of verses that I really, really like:

**Be gentle with yourself,  
you are a child of the universe  
no less than the trees and the stars.  
You have a right to be here.  
Strive to be happy.**

Years ago during my graduate work I heard some tapes by a psychologist, Dr. Murray Banks. He said, "Your happiness depends not so much on getting what you want, but in being happy with what you've got. Don't complain. Be grateful."

Dr. Banks walked the wards of a mental hospital in New York City for 10 years. He said, "One thing you will never hear in a mental hospital is laughter. Because if they could laugh, they wouldn't be there."

Dr. Banks spoke of a man named Eddie Cantor, who was a millionaire entertainer in the 1920's and 1930's. "When the stock market crashed in 1929, you couldn't walk down Wall Street because a body would hit you in the head. People were jumping out of windows right and left. If you checked into a hotel room those days, they asked you: "For sleeping or jumping?"

"Eddie Cantor lost every cent he had, every penny. What did he do- shoot himself? No, he sat down and wrote a joke book called "Caught Short". (He recouped his millions through his book.) "When will we learn that your attitude depends upon not what the world does to you, but upon on the way **you look at it!**"

**Happiness can only be found in one place, inside yourself,** not in another person or another thing. Learn to be happy. No one is born happy, or unhappy, anymore than they are born criminal, polite, refined, or educated. You learn to be happy.

Keep things in perspective. Be balanced. Don't make mountains out of molehills. Don't sweat the small stuff, and it is ALL small stuff.

Don't be afraid. Be thankful of your gifts and your talents and what you do have. And don't complain about what it is you don't have.

Don't worry, be happy.

Persevere. Prove "them" wrong. Be a friend. But most of all, have love.

A favorite author of mine, Leo Buscaglia, once said, "If you have love in your life it can make up for many things that you lack. But if you do not have love, then no matter what it is that you do have, it is not enough."