

Helping LD Students Deal With the Social-Emotional Side of Applying to Colleges

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For students with learning disabilities, the social-emotional component of applying to colleges is often fraught with fear and apprehension beyond what their non-LD peers experience. After all, the application process demands solid skills in executive functioning, organization, time management, processing speed, reading comprehension,

written language, working memory, and mature social judgment. Students with learning disabilities often worry that they are unable to meet expectations and feel overwhelmed as they move through the various stages of the college application process.

There are, however, useful tips and advice that we as independent educational consultants (IECs) can give our clients and their parents. By walking them through the process and dividing the tasks into manageable steps, we can make a successful entry into college possible. Following are 10 ways in which IECs can assist students with LD and their parents in the college application process.

1. Many parents are familiar with only the cocktail circuit schools and do not understand that those schools may not be appropriate choices for their children. Help them distinguish between what makes a good college and what makes a college a good match for the applicant with LD. Parents must often be reminded that just because a school is unfamiliar doesn't mean it is not a good choice for their child.
2. Standardized tests pose difficulty for students with LD, so it's important to communicate to your students that SATs and ACTs should not and cannot define their self-worth. Demystify those standardized tests and help applicants with LD understand that the tests do not demonstrate their academic potential.
3. Explain to your students that their SAT and ACT performances are not accurate predictors of success. Rather, success in life can often be measured by:
 - Resilience
 - Optimism
 - Enthusiasm
 - Dedication
 - Motivation
 - Time management skills
 - Perseverance
 - Connection to community, friends, and family
 - Appreciation of life and the ability to enjoy the moment.
4. Encourage your students to be honest about who they are. If there is a shroud of pretension, the right college match cannot be found. Parents must stress the importance of their child maintaining his or her voice throughout the application process. Teach students never to speak ill of themselves because everyone has strengths and vulnerabilities, and they need not to draw attention to their vulnerabilities.
5. Extracurricular activities may be limited for students with LD compared with their peers. They may need academic tutoring after school in more than one subject, and their homework often takes longer to complete. Their participation offers an opportunity to emphasize the character strengths that enable students with LD to distinguish themselves as strong members of the student body by citing their determination and their diligence as key qualities to possess as individuals.
6. Students with LD frequently have difficulty advocating for themselves. Encourage those applicants to feel proactive

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and self-sufficient. Helping them develop interview strategies is an excellent way to foster resilience, build confidence, and help them feel in control of the application process.

7. Create a list of questions that will help students with LD select appropriate colleges. Questions should be self-reflective and may include:

- How do I learn best?
- What level of support do I require?
- What assisted technology will be beneficial in meeting my individual needs?

8. Identify the culture of the college community that is the best match for your applicant. Ask:

- Do you want a traditional or nontraditional environment?
- What are the activities, clubs, and sports you prefer?
- Does the weekend life match your style?
- What religious affiliations do you require?
- Are athletic opportunities important?
- What academic support will you need?
- Will the counseling options be sufficient?
- Is adequate assisted technology available?
- Are there community service opportunities for you?

9. The college essay is often a source of contention between parents and their child with LD. Parents should read their child's college essay for spelling and grammar errors alone, and let the authentic voice of the applicant emerge. Encourage them to use phrases such as, "Did you consider mentioning A, B or C? I think that a college may want to know that about you." As Marilee Jones advises in her book, *Less Stress, More Success*, "Simply point out the positive; don't attempt to package the applicant into a product you hope the college will buy."

10. Encourage your students with LD to take psychoeducational and neuropsychological tests in their senior year after the college application process is completed. This will strengthen their request for accommodations and interventions that may be granted for the first three years of college, and they will not have to juggle those tests while taking the SATs or ACTs.

Understanding the individual needs of the applicant is essential in determining the appropriate college and forging solid matches for students with LD. The student's social-emotional well-being is contingent upon that research as is the opportunity for academic and personal success.

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