



# Counselors' Corner

Views and opinions from school counselors about the counseling profession

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## Parents: Before You Yell at Your School Counselor

by Patrick O'Connor, Ph.D.

You've worked so hard to schedule, prepare, and nudge your high school senior to apply to college on time. You shared that small thrill when they hit Submit with time to spare, and you thought you were all set.

Until they got the e-mail.

"Our records indicate your application is incomplete. Unless we receive a copy of your high school transcript in the next five days, we will be unable to process your application."

At this point, you've decided this is personal, so even though it's 7 at night, you pick up the phone and leave The Mother of All Voice Mails for your school counselor.

Boy, did you just blow it. Here's why:

**Your entire reaction is based on a wrong assumption.** The college hasn't said "Forget it"; they've said, "We need something." You can help them get what they need. Was that voice mail helping the college? Was it helping your child?

**The college likely has the information.** Even with advanced technology, admissions offices get backed up—so the transcript might not be in your child's file, but it is in the college's application system somewhere. That means your high school counselor—the one you just called incompetent—sent the transcript, and in a timely fashion.

**If the college already has one copy of your transcript, they don't want another one.** If the transcript is already in the college's system, they really don't want a second copy, since that would just increase their backlog. The only way to double check is for someone to call the admission office, and see if the first copy has found its way to your child's file.

**You just berated the person who can help you the most.** To be honest, the person who should call the college is your child (it's their application), but it's likely you want the school counselor to call. You know—the one you just described as incapable of doing their job.

This isn't to say they won't help you and give your child their full support, but if you've just given them a big, and very angry, piece of your mind, you've now put them in a spot where they need to start keeping a paper trail of your, um, complaint. That takes time; so does recovering from being told by someone who last applied to college 20 years ago that you don't know what you're doing. You want the problem resolved now, but you've just prevented that from happening. Is that really a good idea?

**You've just left an impression you can't erase.** Let's say the transcript is already there, or that a second one is sent, making your child's file complete. The college is now considering your child carefully, but they'd like a little more information about them. How does your child react to setbacks? How well do they speak up for themselves? Do they demonstrate flexibility?

The person the college will be talking to is—you guessed it—the school counselor, who is now only able to extol the virtues of your child's ability to hand their problems over to Mommy and Daddy to solve, simply because that's what the counselor has experienced. This isn't about a grudge; this is about their experience.

It's easy to freak out about the college admissions process, but just because you can, it doesn't mean you should. That's even more true when challenges arise, and your child looks to you to set the model for handling adversity they should take with them to college. This assumes the college still wants them. Part of that is up to you.

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