

DESK TO NEST

Jilting Junior Year Jitters

Get your teen beyond the fear and anxiety that can come with efforts to get into college

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Many teens approach 11th-grade with dread. Even if they don't verbalize their anxiety, they know that the ACT or SAT (sometimes both) await them, as do a host of other standardized exams, on the long path called "college admissions."

While many North American colleges downplay the role that test scores play in that process, most university-bound students in the United States still take a variety of tests during their penultimate year of high school—not just the ACT or SAT, but also several SAT Subject Tests and Advanced Placement exams. It's natural, then, that many experience anxiety, especially when they're still juggling coursework and extracurricular activities while preparing for these tests.

Here are some tips to help you and your child get past junior year jitters:

It doesn't matter much whether your child takes the SAT or the ACT. If your child hates science, I recommend the SAT. Otherwise, I advise students take a diagnostic for each, assess which "felt easier" or "more comfortable," and concentrate her prep efforts there. Since most colleges in the States accept either exam (and some require neither), your child's gut reaction to each test should dictate which she ultimately prepares for and takes.

All students benefit from some type of preparation for the ACT or SAT, even if



Parents' support and reassurance goes a long way toward minimizing their teens' anxiety.

that's just doing a practice test online the day before the actual exam. Most students will need more preparation than that, though. Motivated, mature juniors can make their way independently through any one of the popular review books available online or at your local bookstore.

Most 16-year-olds need more direction, though. Teens who have no learning challenges and earn at least average grades in school can benefit from test prep classes offered by large, for-profit chains and often by community-based, non-profit organizations. I recommend enrolling in classes no longer than two hours each and with a maximum pupil: teacher ratio of 12-to-1 so that students can ask questions and receive some personal feedback.

Students who struggle in school or possess a learning disability might find one-on-one tutoring more helpful than classes. An instructor devoted to only one child can refocus the child's attention when his mind wanders and can stop any time he's confused. Some students also feel more comfortable asking questions when they're away from peers. Other students who benefit from private tutoring include those with busy extracurricular schedules or those who live far from classes. Many tutors offer one-on-one sessions with students across the globe through online video chat. If you're interested in individualized, online or in-person

tutoring, feel free to email me directly at info@crimsoncoaching.com.

In short, there's nothing like being well-prepared to relieve nerves when it comes to standardized tests.

"How much" preparation your child needs to "do well" on the ACT or SAT depends on three factors: the child's diagnostic or baseline score; her target score; and the gap between those two. The amount of preparation depends on the difference between her score and the average score of incoming freshmen at her dream college. If your child hasn't yet taken a practice test in school, most test prep books offer one. You can also find them, along with mean test scores, online.

A note of caution: be realistic about how many points a student can increase his score. With the right coaching and disciplined preparation, many can jump 15 percent. But gains of more than 20 percent are rare. Unless your child brings an unusual talent or geographic profile to the admissions table, you might want to reconsider other colleges if all of his picks boast mean test scores 20 percent higher than his diagnostic. Setting realistic expectations won't erase anxiety, but it does mitigate it.

Your attitude sets the tone. Even though your teen rolls her eyes and defies your boundaries, inside she's still looking to you

for approval. She internalizes your anxiety; he assumes your expectations. So, if you want your child to remain happy—or at least healthy—during junior year, work on your own hopes for his or her future first. Then, take the time to assure your child that despite what test designers advertise, standardized exams measure only how well one can take that exam.

Students with stellar scores can flounder in college due to poor study habits, while others with low scores can thrive through perseverance. Since peers, counselors, and teachers sometimes bombard juniors with pressure about how much this school year "counts" towards college admissions, parents' reassurance can go a long way toward assuaging their teens' anxiety. Hearing from you that they can have an amazing college experience at any university—and that you'll love and accept them no matter their test scores—can help your teen to get beyond junior year jitters for good.

Dominique Padurano is president of Crimson Coaching™ (www.crimsoncoaching.com). A magna cum laude graduate of Harvard, Padurano coaches students online and in-person through the college application process and teaches them skills, subjects, and testing strategies. Contact her at info@crimsoncoaching.com

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