

THE NO COLLEGE SMALL TALK PLEDGE

I, _____, hereby pledge to abide by the following rules regulating my college small talk. I realize no one can enforce these rules but me, but I pledge to conduct myself in accordance with these rules. I also realize this list is not exhaustive, and any other rules students suggest are ones I should consider following as well.

1. Strive to discuss college only with your own children.
2. Discuss college with other students only if it is completely, objectively necessary and/or the student has brought it up.
3. It is permissible, in rare instances, to make college small talk if you have run out of all other small talk options; if given no other choice, college small talk *may* be used to break an awkward silence. First, though, you must exhaust all possible discussion of the weather and the Browns.
4. If you do make college small talk, find a fresh way to make it. Do not ask the cliché questions. Find something less trite; you'll likely get a more satisfying answer from the student, too.
5. Not all parents are uber-competitive, small talk-making monsters; some are just curious. If you are that parent, develop a "quick-and-painless" approach; hear what you need to hear and change the subject. Establish a time limit for each round of small talk; no student should be subjected to more than 30 seconds of college small talk at a time.
6. Learn the old adage: "Your safety might be someone else's reach." Never condescend to a school. Ever.
7. Try not to compare your college admissions process with a current student; the process has changed drastically since you applied.
8. Never explicitly or implicitly critique a student's college decisions; rest assured, students are concerned about their own future and do not need your help shaping it.
9. Avoid asking questions that require numerical answers; that is, do not ask about test scores, financial aid and admissions rates.
10. Remember that where a student applies is not solely based on a test score; a student may be fully capable of acceptance at a "selective" college, but may decide against it because of cost, distance, student experience, area of study, athletics, ideological/religious affiliation and dozens of other external factors that are usually none of your business.
11. Strive to be a conversational break from the college process. Students deal with college stuff enough; why not help them take their minds off it?
12. When in doubt, err on the side of not discussing college.

Signed,
