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perseverance
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Responsible
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ependable. ✓
akes smart
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example. ✓

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Good Citizen
Follows rules and
laws. Involved in
family, school,
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TRUMPET, Cord

SECRETS

to a Successful Application

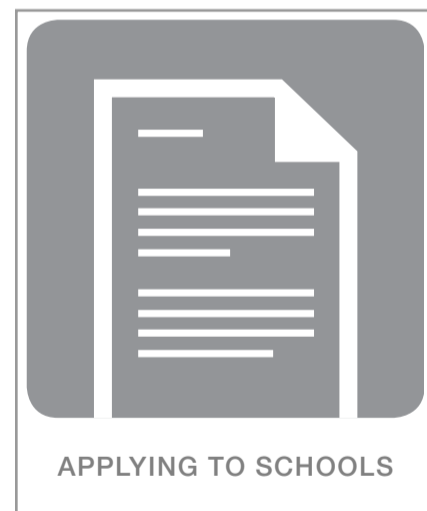
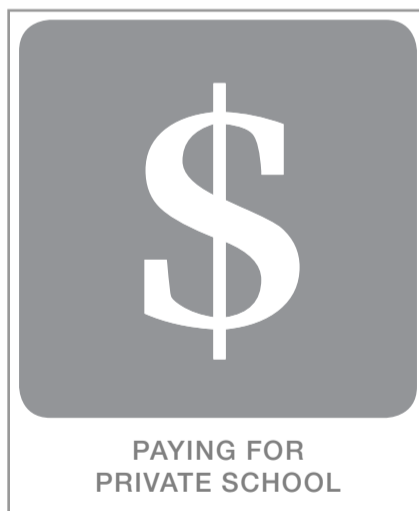
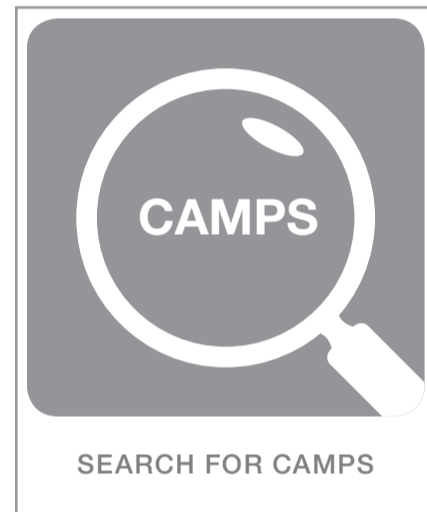
How to gain an edge in applying to private schools



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Thank you for downloading the latest e-book from Our Kids.

Our Kids brings you sound planning strategies and advice to assure you make the right private school and camp decisions for your children.





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Sacred Heart School – Photograph by Scott Munn



Ottawa Montessori Academy – Photograph by John Major



Mentor College
– Photograph by Andrew Tolson

By Lisa Van de Ven

In the years ahead at independent or private school, there will be new friends and challenging class work, sports and extracurricular activities. But first you have to apply.

When applying to independent schools, students' skills are evaluated, their experiences and aptitudes considered. They often take tests, do interviews and then parents are left waiting impatiently for an answer to arrive. But applying doesn't need to be stressful—not if you take your time to find the right fit and consider your child's needs along the way.

“I have met with parents who make this their full-time job . . . and the anxiety that they create in their children as a result is not helpful,” says educational consultant Judy Winberg of Options in Education.

In other words, listen to what your child wants. The older a child is, the more involved in the process he or she should be, Winberg suggests. “But I always say— especially in children up to Grade 6—don't give them the power to make the choice themselves because with that comes the responsibility, and if it doesn't work out then they are going to think they've made a mistake.”

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[What schools might fit best?](#)

[Take this quick and easy test to find out.](#)

Researching Prospective Schools

Before you can choose a school, you need to research the options. “It’s important for the parents to do their homework,” says Chantal Kenny, executive director of admission at [Upper Canada College](#) in Toronto. “I would start with a web search. You can gain so much from websites and from the way schools present themselves, and you can dig a little deeper as well before you engage in conversation with the different people at the schools.”

A web search will help you familiarize yourself with the options that are out there and give you an idea of what’s around that will fit your child’s unique needs. Do you want an [all-boys’](#) or [all-girls’](#) school or a [boarding school](#)? Are you looking for an excellent sports program or specific extracurricular activities that your child is involved in? Maybe you need a more challenging academic program?

[Search for various types of private schools and see what they have to offer.](#)

Schools’ websites will give you an idea of what each institution is all about and offer a starting point in determining which ones may be a fit for your child. This step should be done early. Many independent schools require a year’s lead time, which means that you should start considering where you want to apply the summer or fall a year before you want your child to attend. The applications at [Upper Canada College](#), for example, are due the December prior to admission; deadlines at other schools may be earlier or later.

Each school is unique, so exploring what’s out there is important, adds Pattie Edwards, director of admissions at [The Study](#), an all-girls independent school in Montreal.

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Wildwood Academy – Photograph by Tobi Asmoucha



CGS – photograph by Tim Fraser

Visiting and Choosing Schools

Once you've searched online, narrow your choices down to a few and then visit the schools that seem like the best fit. "We hold an open house in the fall," she says. "Usually it's through a visit to the school that parents determine that this might be an appropriate environment."

Some families apply to more than one school, she adds. And that's something Winberg, for one, recommends. "My thinking there is you can't—pardon the cliché—put all your eggs in one basket," she says. "It's a great, great disappointment if students have only applied to one school and then they don't get in for some reason. So I would apply to two or three, but I wouldn't go crazy."

Applying to too many schools can get stressful, and it can also get expensive. Most schools have application fees attached, so Winberg suggests that setting a budget for the application process might also be a good idea for some parents.

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[Get the 18 tips you need to know to pay for private school.](#)

Bear in mind that many schools have waiting lists and they accept applications more than a year in advance. Some schools also have very specific application deadlines; be sure to use our application calendar ([page 14](#)) as a guide.



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Wildwood Academy – Photograph by Tobi Asmoucha

Taking Time to Apply

Once you've chosen the independent schools you want to apply to and spent some time at each, even bringing your child in to see if he or she is comfortable too, then it's time to fill out the applications. As long as you have all of your deadline dates straight—as well as any supporting documentation, such as the teacher recommendations sometimes required from your child's current school—filling out applications is pretty straightforward, Winberg says.

What admission advisers do recommend is giving as much information as possible on the application, including learning disabilities or anything else that might mean your child will need special attention in the classroom. It's not in the student's best interest to hide any of that, says Susanne Raye, director of admissions at [Aberdeen Hall Preparatory](#) in Kelowna, B.C. "We need to be sure we can provide them with the education they require," she says. "If we really couldn't help that child enough, then we would be very honest and say we just don't have the capacity."

[Find out how private schools help special needs students.](#)

And if you've missed the application deadline for any reason, don't give up completely. While it may be tough in the more sought-after schools to apply outside of deadline dates, others are more flexible—and either way, it never hurts to ask. "Contact the school to find out if there's availability," Edwards suggests.

If you've missed the application deadline for any reason, **don't give up completely.**



Meeting Schools Face to Face

Filling out the application is just one part of the process, though. Most independent schools will want some face-to-face time with prospective students. Depending on the age of the child and the school itself, this might be a formal interview or could be something less official. “In terms of the interview itself, it’s very much a dialogue,” Kenny says, referring specifically to Upper Canada College’s interview process. “It’s a very open conversation—there are no set questions that really have a yes and no answer. It’s about us digging deeper and probing and allowing the students to feel comfortable in the interview process so we can get to know them better.”

While every school will look for something different from the interview, what Kenny says she looks for are several characteristics, including intellectual curiosity and a love of learning, as well as a sense that students are interested in getting involved in the community and can both get along with their peers and feel comfortable in the company of adults.

Upper Canada College
– Photograph by Stan Behal

At Upper Canada College, up until Grade 3, the parents are in the room during the interview, Kenny adds. In fact, it's not even called an interview but is instead referred to as a family visit. From Grade 4 on, interviews are held one-on-one.

"They're nervous," Kenny says. "It's natural to be nervous."

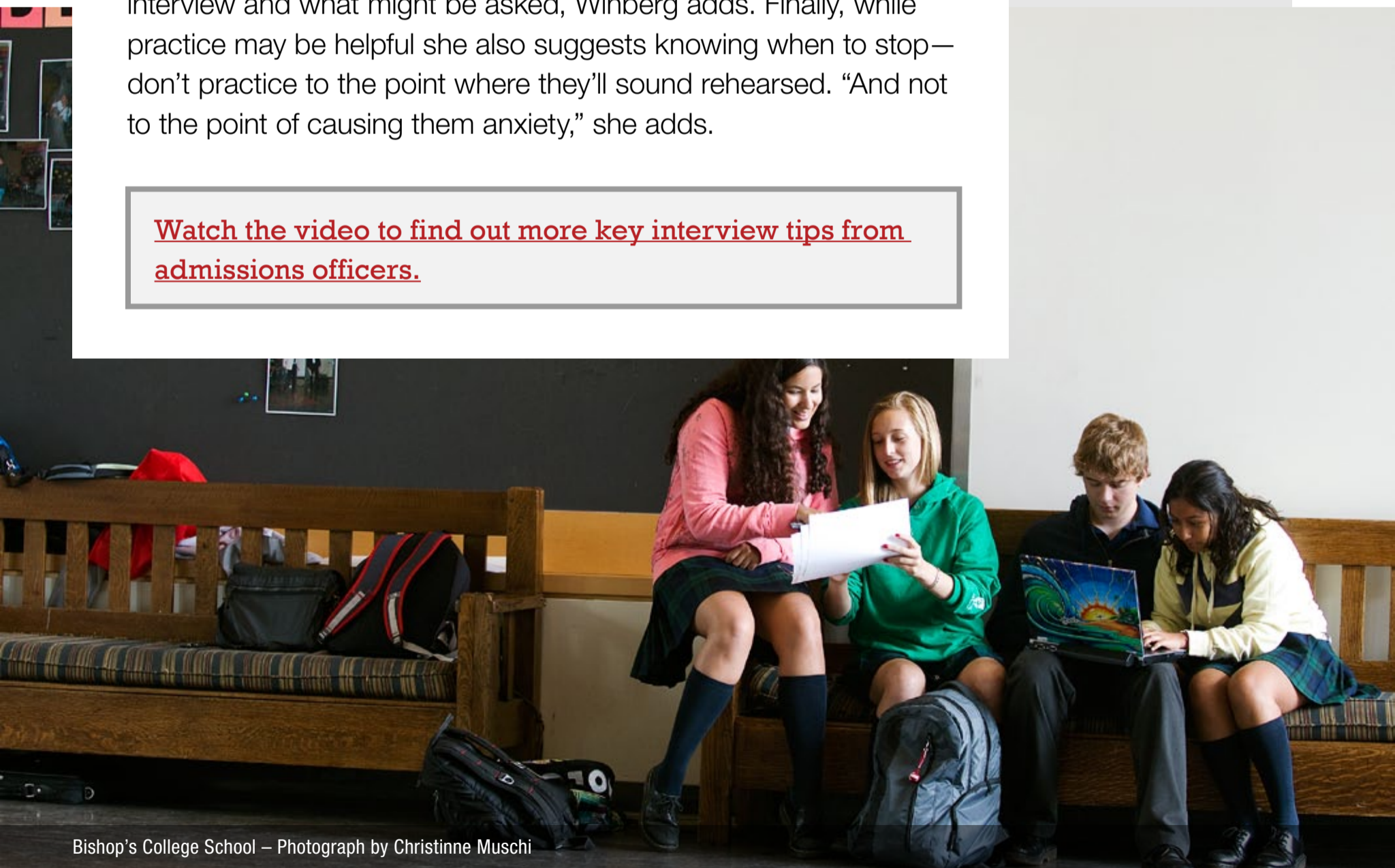
So what can parents do to help their child prepare for the interview and take away some of those nerves?

"I would do a bit of rehearsal," Winberg says. "If you have a very young and shy child . . . you'd better prepare him or her for it, because that could just cause a kid to clam up and not say a word."

It might help to put shy children—who may not have experience talking to other adults—in front of a neighbour or family friend who they don't know well, she says, just to get them used to the idea of conversing with a stranger.

Don't be afraid to call the school ahead of time to talk about the interview and what might be asked, Winberg adds. Finally, while practice may be helpful she also suggests knowing when to stop—don't practice to the point where they'll sound rehearsed. "And not to the point of causing them anxiety," she adds.

[Watch the video to find out more key interview tips from admissions officers.](#)



Bishop's College School – Photograph by Christinne Muschi

Dealing With Application Test Results

Kids might dread them, but tests also help give schools a sense of the students applying. Many schools will rely on past report cards but depending on the school and student's age, independent schools will use in-house or standardized testing to determine where your child stands academically compared to other students of his or her age. How much weight each school puts on the test's final outcome varies across the board, but it's only one factor in the overall assessment of a student. "We're looking at the whole student," Kenny says. "We weigh all of the criteria equally."

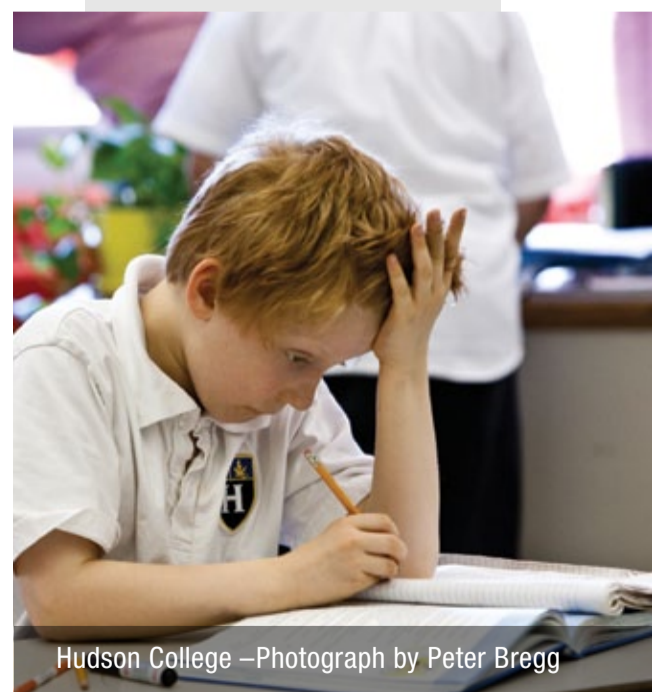
While Kenny herself discourages any special tutoring—it often just creates anxiety—in the case of standardized tests, familiarizing your child with the format of the exam he or she will be taking might help to make him or her feel more comfortable come test day. For example, the SSAT—or Secondary School Admission Test—is one of the more popular standardized tests that independent schools use anywhere between grades 5 and 11. Prep materials for that test are available online to help students familiarize themselves with its format, says Karen Smith, communications director with SSATB, the non-profit organization that runs the test.

"For parents, what they can do is go over test-taking strategies with their child and help them practice," Smith says. "Simulate an actual test in a timed environment, go over errors that your child makes on the test and help your child see if he or she can figure out the right answers."

Parents should also help kids keep the importance of the test in perspective, Smith adds. "It is only one part of the application," she says.

With your applications in and the tests and interviews done, the next step is just waiting it out to see if your child gets into the school of choice. But don't sweat it too much, Winberg suggests. "I always say the year before they get into a private school, children should be concentrating on that year. If they are in Grade 3, they should be thinking about Grade 3 and not Grade 4," she says.

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Hudson College –Photograph by Peter Bregg

Schools' Responses and Your Final Decision

When the responses from schools do start coming in, it can go one of many ways. Parents should be careful not to personalize any disappointment if their child doesn't get accepted. "I think one of the realities is that some schools just get way more applications than they have spots for, and we need to assure a child that it's not their fault, that they're not to blame and that they're not disappointing us," Winberg says. "And it's important for a parent not to badmouth the current school, because if the child has to stay at the current school he or she won't have gained anything by the parent having told their child what a bad school it is."

In a lot of cases, there's also the chance—if a child didn't get in this time around—for other opportunities to apply again, Kenny adds. "Young students who are applying are constantly changing and developing," she says. "They might just need a bit of time."

On the other hand, getting accepted can come with stresses too. Some independent schools in specific areas will often coordinate their responses together so that parents can make an informed choice knowing where their child stands with all of the schools they've applied to. But there can be cases too where they might still be waiting to hear back from their school of choice, uncertain of what to do with the acceptances in hand until they know where the preferred school stands.

Even though deadlines may be looming and schools are waiting for your response, Winberg says not to panic if that happens to you. A simple phone call to the school you've already heard from could do the trick. "Just pick up the phone and say 'here's the situation—I really just need a little time,'" she says.

[Learn the five essential steps to choosing the best school.](#)

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St. Michael's University School – Photograph by Deddeda

After the Offer of Acceptance, What's Next?

So you've got the offer and you've accepted it. What's next?

Make sure you know the deadlines for fees, Winberg suggests. Other than that, Kenny adds, just relax and get to know your child's new school better. Some schools—like Upper Canada College—host days meant to do just that for new students, where the children can get to know the peers they'll be sharing the classroom with come September and where parents can get more comfortable with the school.

If your school doesn't offer events like those, then you can help your child get to know the school better. "If the child is really excited, then great," Winberg adds. "If the child is nervous about it, perhaps you can get the names of other children that are going and arrange for your kids to meet. Take your kids there during the summer and let them walk around and feel comfortable. If they have a summer camp, maybe you could think of enrolling them there."

Other than that, it's just a matter of waiting for September to arrive and for the experience to begin.

Take your
kids there
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and feel
comfortable.

APPLICATION CALENDAR

Use this timetable to help you meet deadlines as part of your school selection process.

Timeline/Tasks	Notes
May <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assemble a list of schools that meet your criteria	
June <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Request catalogues and videos from selected schools	
July <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schedule interviews	
August <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make travel arrangements	
September <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Register for Secondary School Aptitude Test (SSAT), Independent School Entrance Examination (ISEE), or other testing (if applicable)• Schedule interviews at the schools of your choice• Arrange SSAT/ISEE test preparation (if applicable)• Review admissions forms• Complete teacher references	
October <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Go on interviews• Check admissions requirements• Verify admissions deadlines	
November <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete interviews• Determine financial requirements	
December <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take SSAT/ISEE tests (if applicable)• Complete applications	
January <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit applications	
February <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relax and wait! :-)	
March <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watch the mail for school decision letters	
April <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Let schools know your decision	

Don't fuss if you do some of these tasks out of the order suggested above. The main thing is not to leave things until the last minute!

good luck!