For most people around the world, applying for admission to a college or university is a major

event in their lives.

Many young people see it as one of their first steps toward becoming adults.

It is also a lot of work. The competition and risk of rejection can create a lot of stress,

and not just for the applicants.

Parents of high school students are often very involved in the college search process. Sometimes

they are even more invested in the application results than the students themselves.

Ffiona Rees is a senior associate director of international admissions office at the University

of California in Los Angeles. She says most students in the United States would list their parents as the main influence on their college application decisions.

"Even when the students are appearing like they don't want to listen to their parents, they

clearly are," Rees told VOA. "And so, it's important for the parents to be supportive of the

students.

Students look to their parents for all kinds of advice, she says, including where to go and what

to study. But Rees argues there is also some important advice parents need to hear if they want

to be as helpful as possible to their children.

First, parents must accept that there are limits to what they know about the application process,

she says.

She says even parents who attended university in the U.S. themselves, must understand that a lot has changed in just the last 20 years. It is important for parents to join their children in researching the most current college and university requirements.

Working together is important for success, Rees says. And, it can be an important time for parents and students to strengthen their relationships with each other.

Rees says parents need to fully devote themselves to the process if they get involved. She describes one college admissions informational meeting in which she witnessed a parent repeatedly leave the room for phone calls. Rees says the parent may have missed important information. But, as important, is the impression such behavior creates. The parent seemed to not care about the student's interest in attending the school.

"It's really important that the parents take the time to tell their child how proud they are of them ... and to ... tell them that you love them no matter what," Rees said. "Because the students need to hear that. We forget that, while they're young adults, they're still only usually 17, 18 years old and they need to hear that from their parents."

Rees says parents also need to be honest. They may want to protect their children and provide them with everything they want. But students need to know if there are limits to their college search.

For example, will finances restrict their choices? Rees says parents must tell their children exactly how much money they will provide for college.

What about distance? Reese says she once got a phone call from unhappy parents demanding to know why the school had accepted their child whose home was far away. They wanted their child to study closer to home. But they had never discussed that with the student, thinking the application would not be successful. Rees says it is important for parents to express such concerns before the student applies to any school.

It is a thin line to walk, Rees suggests. Parents should talk to their future college students, of course. But she says parents also must listen to them. In the end, Rees notes, it is the child who will be attending the college, not the parents. Young people may not be clear on what their educational interests or desires are. Parents may not care for some of their child's choices. But, Rees says, making such decisions is an important part of becoming an adult.

Such independence is important when it comes to completing college applications as well. Parents may feel the urge to help their children write an essay or fill out a form. Rees advises parents to fight that urge.

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Young people must learn to meet deadlines and take responsibility, she says. Valuable lessons can be learned in the application process. And, schools demand the applicant be the author of his or her application.

Finally, Rees says, most students will likely be rejected by at least one college or university. Parents, she says, can greatly help their children move beyond such rejection in a healthy way.

"It's much like when you have a toddler and they fall down," she said. "If you rush to them and say, ‘Oh, you must be hurt. Are you okay?' the child is going to react accordingly. If ... you say, ‘You're fine! Get up, off we go,' then your child is also going to react accordingly. ... They will get some letters of denial. They are not personal rejections, and it is important that you help to remind your child that they are still a good person."