

Guest Blogger Jenny: Those Pesky Application Questions!

Description

Ah, it's application time again. I remember mine well. Sitting down at the kitchen table, pen in hand (why can't they have these things online, since I'm way more comfortable on a keyboard; I always pitied the AD who had to decipher my chicken scratch printing). I tried to bust them all out in one evening, figuring that once in the groove, completion was possible.

What struck me most about the applications were the questions that weren't really about my child. I could handle the strengths and weaknesses type of questions. One can always turn a child's weakness into a kind of strength. For instance: "Although my daughter likes to play independently, that independence makes it easy for her to work on longer term projects." Reading between the lines: my kid doesn't do well in groups, but you'll never have to harass her to get her work done on her own, either. It's a decent enough trade off.

If faced with these types of questions, there are probably terms you should avoid (and remember, this is just my opinion). Terms such as "spirited," "strong-willed," "energetic," and the godforsaken "Indigo child" should be stricken from the application record. Private schools aren't actively looking for kids who are a pain; they're looking for kids who will fit in with their program. Stick to a story that demonstrates strength of character. And think about reports you've received about your child's in class behavior. Kids historically always behave worse with their parents, (ostensibly because the parents, unlike non-relatives, won't leave their badly behaved child by the side of the road), than with their teachers. Use these classroom behavior reports to describe your children; they're going to be in classrooms at these private schools, not throwing a fit over bedtimes and privileges.

But back to the murkier questions I mentioned, the ones that have NOTHING to do with your child, and everything to do with you. How about this one: *To which clubs and organizations does your family belong?* (Yes, there is a question on one of the applications that reads along those lines). Now, you might be tempted to write, "Bacon of the Month Club" (a service I heartily recommend). But that's not what they're asking. Let's be brutally honest here. There are only a handful of desirable answers to this question. Places like California Club and Jonathan Club are right up there. Hillcrest Country Club, Wilshire Country Club, L.A. Country Club, and Riveria Country Club are good ones, too. This is a money question. If your family can afford clubs such as these, your family might be able to generously contribute during Annual Giving. No mystery there.

Here's another one: *To which charities and community organizations does your family belong?* Again, I'm not sure the schools really care about the fifty bucks you give to Greenpeace. You know what's really exciting? If you're on the board of, say, Children's Hospital. Yes, they're interested in that type of

involvement. That being said, know your audience. If youâ€™re very active in Planned Parenthood, but youâ€™re applying to St. Brendanâ€™s, you might want to avoid that detail.

On the other hand, if you were part of a neighborhood drive to get crime under control, or raise money for Haiti, or were heavily involved in the running of your old school, DO mention it. Private schools want go-getting parents who organize groups and get things done; they want parents to be involved in raising awareness and money. If thatâ€™s your skill set, flaunt it for all itâ€™s worth. Even though it has very little to do with your child.

So, donâ€™t be intimidated by those bizarre queries. Not everyone applying to these schools is a millionaire. Not everyone is on a board, or belongs to an exclusive club, or even belongs to the Bacon of the Month Club. Go with what you feel you have to offer, all the while turning anything negative into a positive. And, for goodness sake, use a good pen.

Jenny Heitz has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. She has been published in the Daily News. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).

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