

Guest Blogger Alice: The Letters Are Coming!

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It's nearly March and there is nothing left to do but wait. Private elementary school [admissions letters](#) all come out on the 13th and emails are sent on the 14th. For Pasadena, it's March 6. At this point, you're not sure which sedative to take and you can't be seen drinking before noon. It's time to develop other coping strategies.

My personal best strategy is to try and forget. This is not easy and takes a lifetime of forced forgetfulness to be really good at. I have a famously bad memory derived from years of purposely blocking unpleasant things out, but for those new to the concept, you can avoid some, not all, of the stress if you follow these three important tips:

- Don't talk about it with all the other parents you know who are applying to schools!
- Stop looking at the application materials that state the date. Knowing it's vaguely in March is much more relaxing than knowing the exact day, trust me on this.
- Don't call the admissions director "just one last time".

If it's too late for you and the date is ingrained in your psyche then you have to engage in more rational behaviors. The most rational by far is to know your back up plan. If you have a solid back up plan that you can actually live with, you are way ahead of the game. So while you already likely have a first choice, second and third, you should also have the nuclear option. You need to be able to answer the question: What if my brilliant, perfect, deserving child gets in nowhere? L.A. is insanely competitive and it has happened.

Also, if you know the school you want is right and [you either didn't get in, or were wait-listed](#), don't make a series of panicked calls the day you get your letter. Along the way I've been on a few wait-lists, my son at Buckley, a daughter at Harvard-Westlake, and being the one pestering the schools over the weekend won't help your cause. The schools purposely time things so your letter comes on a Friday and emails on a Saturday morning. They do this so you "and they" have the weekend to calm down. Wait until you are very calm and purposeful and it's at least a Monday before you call. Know what you want to say, write it down if need be. This will go a long way if your goal to keep good relations and reapply.

Back up plans vary from family to family, from giving a young child more time in preschool to enrolling in public school, to moving out of town, or out of state. There are families who really do choose to move when things go south. If public school is NOT an option for whatever reason, and if you live in L.A. on purpose, it's not a bad idea to know some of the other lesser-discussed private options.

There are church and temple schools that are less competitive and some take rolling applications. There are Montessori's that don't require you know anyone of the Board of Directors or currently working in the White House. That was our back up for kindergarten. We had a very good Montessori that went through sixth grade that we could have lived with. There are for-profit private schools that are small and not too swanky, but who will take great care of your child as you contemplate reapplying next year.

And that of course, is the final answer. If you know you belong somewhere, you can reapply next year and if nothing else the school will value your commitment. Also, use time between now and then to look honestly at your child, your family and the application you wrote and make sure you're putting your best foot forward. Are there some weaknesses that might be addressed?

If, for example, you did things on your application like drew pretty pictures, or used multiple color pens in order to stand out, next time "don't do that. (I know from a friend's experience it doesn't work). Maybe your child does need to address some social or academic issues you thought weren't important. Perhaps the school is like a country club and your family is the outsider. That's a difficult hurdle to overcome, no matter how wonderful your kid is.

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In the end, hopefully you'll be [pouring the wine to celebrate rather than drown your sorrows](#), but know, as vital as this all feels right now, in the larger scheme of lives well lived, children becoming adults and prospering, it really just a tiny bump in the road. Perspective is everything. Cheers.

Mother of three, Alice attended east coast private schools as a child and has been in the private school world as a parent for nearly twenty years. Her kids attended Mirman for elementary, then [Harvard-Westlake](#) and Brentwood for high school, with one still to go. She is a writer working in film, TV and for various magazines such as Family Fun, Wondertime, Glamour and Brides.

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