



The College Spy® Podcast with Michelle McAnaney

Episode 12

Parenting Advice for Complex Kids: An Interview with Diane Dempster of Impact Parents

Welcome to The College Spy podcast, a podcast for parents and students addressing all aspects of the college selection and admissions process. I'm Michelle McAnaney, the founder of The College Spy. We offer college planning services to students and families across the United States and internationally. We are a team of dedicated educators who are committed to helping students and families identify the right colleges to apply to and get accepted. We offer our guidance and expertise in a way that improves student performance, increases confidence and promotes college readiness and maturity. The College Spy works with all students including students interested in the STEM fields, students with learning differences, international students, and third culture kids. To learn more about The College Spy, visit our website at TheCollegeSpy.com and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

Welcome to episode 12 of The College Spy Podcast. This episode contains my interview with Diane Dempster of Impact Parents, The College Spy's tip of the day, and a college spotlight on Rhode Island School of Design.

Diane Dempster is a certified professional coach, speaker, educator, and the co-founder of Impact Parents. She works with parents of children with complex issues to improve their personal and family lives by gaining new skills. Increasing their confidence and learning to use coaching techniques in their parenting. Diane received a master's degree from the University of Michigan School of Public Health and her coaching certification from the Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching. She is a licensed CHADD parent to parent trainer, an international workshop presenter, and a regular speaker at national conferences.

Michelle McAnaney:

Welcome to The College Spy Podcast, Diane Dempster. So glad to have you.

Diane Dempster:

So glad to be here as well, Michelle. Thanks for having me.

Michelle McAnaney:

Can you tell our audience a little bit about yourself and about Impact Parents?

Diane Dempster:

Yeah, absolutely. So Impact Parents does parent training and coaching. And we support parents of kids of all ages, but we work with the parents. And so we have parents of younger kids, teens and tweens. And we also have parents who have either emerging young adults or young adults



that are in their 20s and even sometimes their 30s. But we support the parents in a lot of different areas. Part of it is about how to help my kid, particularly a lot of your parents are kids of older teens and college age kids. And it's hard to know "when do I help? When am I supporting versus enabling? How much do I help? My kids need more help than I want to give them." There's this sort of, "what do I do?" It's the overarching thing. And so we help parents stay calm. We help parents to collaborate. We help parents to know when to support and when to step back and how to do that.

Michelle McAnaney:

I'd love to talk to you more about that today, because I see it a lot in my work as a college admissions consultant. Parents will hire me in order to help their child with the admissions process. And then they struggle with letting me do that sometimes or letting their child. They want to be super, super involved, which sometimes works out fantastic and it's just a perfect fit for the whole family. And other times it really causes a lot of conflict in the family and impedes the process.

Diane Dempster:

Yeah, that makes sense. And when we talk about parenting and the parenting roles, we've described four roles: director, the collaborator, the supporter, and the champion. And we work primarily with parents of complex kids. So I didn't actually say that earlier, but we're talking about kids with neurodiversity, kids with ADHD, LD, ASD, anxiety, those sorts of things. And so what happens particularly in that audience is that the kids need more help than they want to need, and the kids need more help than the parents want to give. And it's this sort of, so we go back to the roles, director, collaborator, supporter, and champion. We know how to be the director, when our kids are little, we set the pace, we're in the lead, "okay, we're going to come home, and we're going to do homework, and then we're going to play outside, and then we're going to have dinner" and we're making it happen, and being the executive function, and moving the game forward. And then at some age, for some of us, we're lucky and it's 13, for some of us we're not so lucky and it was 9 or 7, but our kids started saying "mom, dad, I don't want you to be in charge. I want to be at my own pace." And so we need to move out of that more director mode into the collaborative supportive mode. But we don't know how to do that as well. And our kids say, "I don't want you to help me at all". And so then we go "fine" and we step back and we're like, good luck and we secretly go "Oh, my gosh, maybe they'll fail" or "Oh, my gosh, I'm terrified because they probably will fail". And then we see that as an excuse to say "see, I told you you need me". We dive back in at director level and the kids there's a lot of tension and frustration because the kid doesn't need a director. They may need help, but they don't necessarily need a director. And I think that the problem is we don't know what else to be and we haven't found anything else that works. So it's really important to see how do I get buy in from the kid? How do I really see what their goals are? How do I move into instead of trying to get them to do what I want them to do? How do I begin to help them figure out what they



want? And move into that, which is part of what I think you're doing in the process of helping them figure out where do I want to go in terms of a college match, right?

Michelle McAnaney:

And it's easier for me, I think, often than the parent because I'm not the parent. And so the kids are a little bit more, willing to let me collaborate or direct as needed or, I might just have more of a collaborative style automatically. Because, I don't know, because of who I am or because of my background in school counseling. It's interesting what you say about that parent has troubles, they struggle moving from director to collaborator because they don't know how and they haven't found what worked. Because I've spent some time wondering about that when parents are struggling with it. And, perhaps I need to give them some tips and language and how do you know what to do?

Diane Dempster:

Exactly, part of it is about language, but part of it is about mindset, right? What I notice is that if we get anxious and overwhelmed, and maybe even a little freaked out and the process you're dealing with is a scary, intense, sometimes high pressure thing. If we go into overwhelm, we're not actually in our problem solving brain. We're in the part of our brain that's more emotional and charged let's call it that. And in our emotional charged brain, we're really black and white. And so our idea is like "either I'm in charge or you're in charge", right? That somebody's got to be in charge, that panic part of our brain is like "Somebody has to be in charge, if it's not me It's you" and then we watch our kids and our kids are not going to be in charge the way that we would want to be in charge. So then we're like, "okay, that means we have to be in charge, right?" So we're fighting with our amygdala and that's the part of it is this, when I say we don't know how to, it's hard to when you're overwhelmed and freaked out. Which is very common when you're dealing with the processes you're dealing with and when you're dealing with a kid with learning and attention issues or any kind of difference. Job number one is how do I keep myself regulated? How do I keep myself out of freak out mode? Then you can engage in some of these tools and a lot of it is language, Michelle. And you know this because you do this. It's asking them questions instead of telling. That's one of my tools, it's ask don't tell. It's going to your kid with ideas, asking permission to share the ideas. How many times do our kids come home from school and it's like we pounce on them "oh, I was thinking about this thing all day". So I'm pouncing on my kid with this thing I've been thinking about all day and the kid's like "wait a second. I just need to put my backpack down and put my feet up for 15 minutes and take a few deep breaths and go to the bathroom". And so figuring out how to enter into conversation with our kids by the way that we do with other adults. We call somebody up on the phone, we don't just start talking. We say, "Hey, did I catch you at a good time? Is it okay for you?" It's a sort of entering into collaborative conversation and then saying, "I have some ideas. Do you mind if I share them" or "here are some thoughts, which one makes sense to



you?" So it's that more open question based conversation rather than the directive "here's what you need to do next" conversation.

Michelle McAnaney:

As you're talking i'm thinking about that parent who's like "i've got this tool and i'm going to ask my question" and then they'll be like "my kid doesn't answer the question."

Diane Dempster:

Right, I got an entire blog that I wrote called "What to Do When Your Kid Says, I don't know". It's what do you wanna do? There's a lot of reasons kids don't have the answers. Number one is legitimate, right? This is "I really, I don't know. I haven't figured it out." Sometimes particularly neurodivergent kids feel pressure to get it right. There's this hesitancy, some insecurity, and things like that come into it. Sometimes we just need time to process. It may be just saying "okay, you'll figure it out. Let me come back after dinner. We can talk about it then." Or "let me know if you need some ideas." So instead of, assuming that if they say no, "that's my permission to jump in". Give them some space to figure it out, are they even interested in figuring it out or is it my agenda. They're like "I don't want to think about college right now. You're thinking about college" or "I don't want to think about what's after high school. I'm just busy working on basketball or homework or whatever it is that I'm working on."

Michelle McAnaney:

Yeah, I hear that a lot. The kid is not ready to talk about it, but the parents are, and it causes a lot of tension in the family. Sometimes I advise them to just pick a day. "Okay, we talk about colleges on Wednesday nights. We order pizza and that's when we talk about college, but we don't talk about it all the time" kind of thing. Another thing that I see happen is a parent might ask the question, but they don't listen to the answer necessarily. And the child knows that's going to be the pattern. So they don't want to say.

Diane Dempster: "You're going to tell me what you want to tell me anyway, mom. And so let me just hear what you want to tell me."

Michelle McAnaney:

And so a lot of times, my goal with kids often is to get them to talk. Cause I really want to understand who they are, what's important to them, what do they care about? So I can suggest the right colleges that are going to be a really good fit, or just so that I can intervene to help them make some changes. Maybe it's doing more homework, or studying differently, or picking extracurricular activities. And I find that the best way often to help them make those changes, is just to listen to them to really understand where they're coming from.



Diane Dempster:

There's a term in the therapeutic community called pairing. And pairing is about developing rapport with the kid in some area so that you can begin to move into a collaborative relationship. We want our kids to collaborate around the important stuff, but our kids, they don't have the trust, or we don't have the strength in relationship. Because over time, those sorts of things, our kids are, striving for their own independence. And so we end up separating and then we're all of a sudden like "work with me to figure out college" and the kid's like "wait a second". So we might need to go and play video games. You might need to go for a walk with the dog and talk about what's important to our kids and not what's important to us. Rebuilding that relationship and the trust as a foundation to be able to collaborate on the harder things is really important. Figure out what they love and step into their world instead of expecting them to come into yours. It's a hard thing to do and nobody wants to learn as much about video games as I know, because I had a gamer kid, but it helps with connecting, it really does. Even asking questions like "what is it that you love about this game?" "oh, man, you wouldn't believe, it's so intense, and I have to be strategic and I have to make sure that I'm being really cautious. Or "I really love playing with my friends and we're super competitive". You're learning about your kids skills and interests.

Michelle McAnaney:

And you're not going to be so upset about those video games and the colleges aren't upset about them. They're building arenas to attract the kids who are interested in gaming. The parent is constantly going "no". And the colleges are like, here's a scholarship for gaming. And that's confusing.

One of the other things I really wanted to talk to you about is coaching I hear from families a lot, either in my own work or I run this Facebook group. It's called "Parents of college bound students with LDs, ADHD, and ASD". And I see a lot in there. "Does anybody know of a coach?" "Is there coaching for this? I'm having this problem. I need somebody to support me."

Diane Dempster:

Yeah, and there's so many different places we could go with it. The first piece is just "what even is coaching and why is it different?" And, at the highest level, coaching is about digging deep to look at what's really going on in a situation, looking for the blocks, looking for the challenges and moving forward. So digging deep and moving forward. So if you've got a kid with executive function challenges, really looking at what's going on. If the kid has fears, and limiting beliefs, and gremlins, self esteem issues, looking at that piece of it. And so it's looking at what's going on. Not to do therapy, coaches are not therapists, but it is therapeutic as to look at "this is what's going on for me. This is what's getting in the way of me creating my goals, creating my vision, moving forward in my life." So that's the highest level. And I think the thing for me, Michelle, because I had a lot of the same sort of conversations with parents, they're looking for a coach for their kid. And the first question I ask: "is your kid asking for help?" Coaching



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WE KNOW COLLEGES.

requires a person to say, this is my agenda and this is what I want to do. A coach needs a partner. And so if the parents over here saying, I want a coach for my kid, and the kid's not ready to ask for help, or the kid's thinking "I'm just doing this because my mom's making me", the kid is not going to be as engaged in the coaching. I see a lot of parents throw money away on coaches because their kid's not ready to get help. Which is why we work with parents, because we can help the parents, help the kid get to the point where they're ready to get help. Because these are kids with attention and learning issues, they need support and accommodation, and a lot of them need skill building. A lot of times the skills are taught in school, but they weren't ready to learn the skills because they're behind developmentally. So you want to be able to be there and available for these kids to help them learn the skills, and they have to be ready. It's not something you can necessarily just impose on them. It creates a dynamic a lot of times where the kids are like "I don't really want this and I'm just going to it because mom and dad are making me"

Michelle McAnaney:

And they also feel like it's another thing. Like it's another appointment. Another thing.

Diane Dempster:

Or that "I'm broken. Here mom and dad think I'm broken and they're making me do this thing because they think there's something wrong with me". And we're always concerned and worried about our kids self esteem. And so normalizing getting help is important. Getting help, this is what I preach about, getting help is an adulting skill, and we don't talk about that to our kids very much. Our kids see us is not needing help. Like "when I'm a grown up, I'll do everything independently and nobody will be helping me." You don't cut your own hair. Michelle, I don't know if you work on your own car, or do your own taxes, right? We all get help for stuff, right? And yet kids have this visual "I won't need any help anymore." And so shifting that and beginning to talk about where you need help as a grownup, get a coach for yourself so that you can help yourself figure out how do I better support my kids so that then you're modeling getting help and you're asking for help more. And you're demonstrating how important it is to seek support and to identify: here's my strengths, here's my challenges. I'm gonna fill it in with accommodations and support.

Michelle McAnaney:

As you're talking, I'm thinking about that kid who needs to then go to the office of disabilities when they get to college and register for getting help and how oftentimes they don't want to do that. But if it's been normal and is in their family. We all get help. That's just what they're going to do. How can parents listening to this podcast get help from impact parents? What do you offer?



Diane Dempster:

So impact parents, as I said, we do parent training and parent coaching. So if you have a kid with. Learning issues, attention issues. We call them complex kids, so kids with ADHD, anxiety, autism, dyslexia, learning differences, those sorts of things. We help the parents to help support their kids. And we do that in a lot of different ways. We have our own podcast, "Parenting with Impact", we also have a fabulous blog, we do free webinars. And what I would say is that a lot of parents get stuck in information land because there's a lot of information out there. What coaching does, is really help you to take information and turn it into action. So parents are struggling with their complex kid, they come to us to say "I want to be less frustrated. I want to yell less. I want to feel less lost. I want to have more confidence and more calm in how I'm engaging with my kids. I want to know how to step back and let my kids step up." So all of these things are things that we help parents with. And to really engage to launch successful independent kids, which is what we all want, I think underneath it all.

Michelle McAnaney:

How can families get in touch with you if they want more information?

Diane Dempster:

So we have actually a free guide that we've got specifically for the audience of this podcast in the show notes. There'll be a link, I think it's [impactparents.com/spy](https://www.impactparents.com/spy). And so we'll make sure that's there. And it's our free guide for 12 tips for either common, confident parenting or really how to best support your complex kid.

Michelle McAnaney:

Great. So people can just go to the show notes, click there, get the guide, and there'll be information about how to get in touch. Thank you so much for coming on The College Spy Podcast, Diane I really appreciate it.

Diane Dempster:

Thanks, Michelle. It's been great talking to you.

If you're feeling stressed and overwhelmed by the college admissions process, this is for you. Our next session of College Admissions 101 is starting soon. This four week course is the perfect opportunity for you to gain the knowledge and confidence that you need to help your student through the college selection and admissions process. College Admissions 101 is a live and interactive course on zoom for parents of students in grades 9, 10 and 11. Over the four weekly sessions we cover the key topics that you need to know to successfully navigate the college admissions process. At The College Spy we live and breathe college all day long and share expert insights into the frequent changes to this process. It's not the same process we went



through back in the late eighties and nineties. So save yourself hours of research and costly mistakes that could affect your student's admissions prospects with this course. You'll be working directly with me, Michelle McAnaney the founder of The College Spy. As we discuss key topics, including:

- How to build a college list that best fits your child and their unique personality, skills, and interests
- How to research colleges to fully understand what they have to offer, including how to find those colleges that offer a lot of merit aid
- How to choose between SAT, ACT, and test optional
- The college application timeline
- College application strategies for success
- And how to think about financial aid options, both need based and merit based.

If you can't attend one of the four sessions, you'll get a recording so you won't miss any useful information. We also save time for Q& A in each session where you can ask questions about your child's situation and circumstance. Spots are going quickly. Head to thecollegespy.com and then click on Services and Group Workshops to register for the next session. I hope to see you there.

The College Spy's tip of the day:

At the beginning of your college search, identify the resources you will need to help you in college, such as counseling, a writing center, a math lab, or tutoring. And make sure the colleges on your list have them. You can find these resources on each college's website. To learn even more, make an appointment to meet with these centers when you visit campus. Often, they are more than happy to show you their space and talk to you about how they help students. Not sure what help you will need? One way to identify what you will need in college is to think about the resources you needed when you transitioned from middle school to high school. It is likely that you will need the same type of assistance.

Today's college spotlight is on Rhode Island School of Design.

The Rhode Island School of Design, or RISD, is located on College Hill at the edge of Providence, Rhode Island's Historic District, about a half a mile from downtown. The campus architecture is New England colonial style, with red brick buildings from the 1800s and early 1900s. RISD was one of the first independent colleges of art and design in the United States and was incorporated in 1877 as both a school and museum. The RISD Museum is home to 100,000 pieces of art ranging from ancient Egyptian and Roman art to works by Monet, Matisse, and Picasso. RISD students graduate with a BFA in one of 16 undergraduate majors. Some of the most popular include illustration, industrial design, graphic design, and architecture. Students have the option to choose a concentration, which is similar to a minor, to enrich their major. Unlike some art schools, Students are required to complete coursework in the liberal arts. All



freshmen participate in first year studios in experimental and foundation studies. Faculty work closely with students to introduce them to RISD's studio learning approach and group critiques. Many of RISD's classes are studio style and hands on. The average class size is 14 and the student faculty ratio is 9 to 1. RISD's campus is adjacent to Brown University and the colleges have a cross registration relationship. Allowing students to take classes at either school. Students can apply to participate in a dual degree program as well. Winter session, the break between the first and second semesters, is an intensive five week session in which students typically take one class. During this time, some students participate in short term global programs. Recent areas of study include photography in Paris, Renaissance painting in Florence, puppetry in Bali, and signs and symbols in Ghana. RISD is highly selective and the workload can be intense. There are approximately 2,200 undergraduates who are known to be liberal and open minded. Launch program helps acclimate freshmen to college life. There are about 70 on campus student clubs and organizations based on shared interests, identities, and cultural backgrounds and perspectives. There are no intercollegiate sports teams, but there are club sports including cycling, a coed ice hockey team, midnight soccer, and ultimate frisbee. The Artist's Ball is an on campus tradition featuring over the top student made costumes. The party scene at RISD is small, and some students head to Brown or Providence on the weekends for more options. RISD Farm, a 33 acre recreation area on the Narragansett Bay, is also a popular weekend destination.

Here are some interesting facts about RISD. RISD was founded in 1877 by a small group of women, long before they even had the right to vote. RISD was the first university, after law and medical schools, to stop participating in the U. S. News College Rankings. Airbnb co founders Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia met at RISD. And, the Talking Heads Band was formed at RISD in 1974. David Byrne, Chris France, and Tina Weymouth all met there.

Famous alumni from RISD: James Franco, Nicole Miller, Seth MacFarlane, and Chris Van Alsburg.

The College Spy interviewed a current RISD student. Here are some of the questions that we asked and the student's answers.

What is the best place on campus to hang out with friends or meet new people? *The dorm workrooms are a really nice place to hang out with friends and make bonds, while also getting assignments done. The Brown University Main Green is my favorite place when the weather is nice.*

What is the best food or meal at the dining hall? *The poke bowl is one of my favorites, but I also enjoy the themed meals our dining hall does, like Chinese New Year, Thanksgiving, and the Rhode Island State Fair.*



And finally, What is the best kept secret on campus? *The special collections above the library are not known about and utilized other than by RISD students. In them contain original artwork, artist books, and literature too fragile for the main library.*

Thank you for listening to The College Spy podcast. For more information about The College Spy, visit our website at thecollegespy.com. For college admissions tips and up to date trends in admissions, follow The College Spy on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). Don't forget to like and subscribe to this podcast. We always appreciate five star reviews. See you next time.

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