



Episode #133:

**College Application Strategies for
Differently Wired Students**

November 6, 2018

Debbie: Hey Marisa, welcome to the podcast.

Marisa: Hey Debbie. Thank you so much for having me. Excited to be here.

Debbie: This is an interesting topic for our listeners. We have done one episode having to do with college and in that we covered the high school to college transition and we actually had an expert on who works with students to help manage that transition and kind of the anxieties and how to set yourself up for success. But today I'm really excited because we're going to be talking about earlier in that process and how to go through that application process with a specific eye towards differently wired kids and what's unique for them throughout this journey. So before we get into that, just take a few minutes to introduce yourself and tell us about the work that you do in the world.

Marisa: Yeah absolutely and I love that you've covered the transition there already. So we're taking a step back and kind of filling in the blanks for everybody. So as Debbie said, my name is Marisa Meddin. I am the founder of Talk College To Me. So my number one goal when I started this adventure was to help parents specifically. Um, I know there's a lot of people out there helping the kids, but my goal is to really help the parents help their kids throughout their whole time in high school to best prepare for the college application process and then to actually fill out those college applications. So ultimately all of the parents can help their kids have the very best chances of getting accepted to the schools that are right for them.

And I say throughout high school, not to, um, you know, I still think kids should be kids and they shouldn't live their life just to do things for college, but really to inspire parents to help their kids find the right path and find the right activities that are unique to them and that they're really excited about and that make them stand out for who they really are. And to find the schools that, you know, it may be an ivy league school or it may be somewhere totally different, but to find the schools that are really, really the right fit for the kid because that's going to set them up for success later in life and to really enjoy their time. So that's, that's my number one mission.

Debbie: It's such a valuable service because this is, as you know I'm sure from the parents you've talked to, this is a subject that many of us feel anxiety about. And we might feel anxiety when our kids are even quite young because we recognize that this journey may not be as straightforward as it is for some other kids who, who are on a more traditional path or following education in a, in a more traditional way. And I just have to interject for one minute and just tell my listeners that I'm talking to Marisa and she's in Bali right now. So just gotta love modern technology and I love that you have created this, this lifestyle where you can travel and do the work that you love. So anyway, sorry, that's nothing to do with the conversation but interesting factoid.

Marisa: Exciting all the same and I help parents no matter where I am in the world. And I love that I can do that.

Debbie: Yeah, it's really fantastic. So, well I'd love to just hear about, you said that one of the things you do is help parents prepare for the process. So let's talk about that. What does that actually entail and when do we start preparing in the first place?

Marisa: Wonderful question. So, um, as we can talk about a little bit, so I have an online course that I offer for parents that helps them prepare and a lot of times people say, well when do I start that? And it's really great for all four years of high school. So whether your kid is a freshman in high school, a sophomore, junior or senior, I always tell parents it's never too early or too late no matter where you are on the stage. And the course is super helpful for all parts of it. But the earlier you start, so if you are able to take it freshman or sophomore year, while your kid is that age, I highly recommend it. And again, as I kinda mentioned, not to get super crazy about preparing for college when they're just starting their freshman year for example. But what it does is really help ease the fears of the unknown.

So what I've found and the reason that I created this course for parents specifically is that there was two kinds of parts that parents are facing. One is that, as you mentioned, they had a ton of anxiety. They were just feeling really anxious that they weren't sure exactly what they should be doing each year. Should they be doing more, should they be doing less, what dates and deadlines should they kind of have in mind. And then the second part that I realized was that a lot of times parents didn't know what they didn't know, if that makes sense. So they weren't even nervous about the things that they maybe should have been looking into. So, so that's where I jump in and the earlier that parents go through the course. So it's a, it's a seven day online course. So it's really meant for someone to start, um, take them from point a to point z and understand the whole process.

And what I love is that a lot of parents, let's say you have a freshman or a sophomore for example, in high school, you can go through the course, listen and watch the whole thing and it has helpful worksheets and things, but some of it's going to be applicable now and some of it it's going to be advice for kids during their junior year, during their senior year. But by listening to it now, parents tend to just feel way, way, way more at ease that they have the whole situation handled because they then feel confident, okay, I know I've done all the things I'm supposed to do freshman year. I know I'm keeping track of all the things that are supposed to happen sophomore year and even though I have nothing to do yet, I just kind of know in the back of my head the things that I'll supposed to be doing over the next few years and it just becomes less scary. If that makes sense.

Debbie: It certainly makes sense. And you saying we don't know what we don't know, that's so true. I mean that's the case of everything I guess in parenting, but I think especially with a process like this, you know, it's hard to wrap your head around what it's actually going to entail and then there is that fear of my child hasn't started their resume yet and they're in 7th grade or you know. So you would say that freshman year of high school is, is around the time that it's good to start just thinking about this entire process that, that would be kind of the earliest, would you say, that you recommend?

Marisa: Yeah, that's the earliest. Um, there are sometimes parents of seventh graders, of eighth graders who, really starting early, choose to listen to it. And that's up to every parent but I would say if possible by freshman year, by sophomore year if there's any parents of juniors or seniors, the course is so helpful too as you get into the weeds of all of it. But the earlier you can listen and they, and I keep saying this because I don't want to undermine the statement as I talk to, you know, I was even talking to the principal of my high school the other day about the course that I offer and how the parents can take it. And he said Marisa we don't, um, you know, we never want parents to feel like when their kids are freshmen, that they have to be so obsessed with that and that life should revolve around it and activity should revolve around college, and I wholeheartedly agree.

So even when you take the course freshman year, it's not to say that parents need to be and, and kids as well, like super, super preparing, but there are steps to start taking and start thinking about. And again, really just to have that roadmap of what the rest of high school will look like. Because with anything in life, whether it's a job, starting a new hobby, or you know, someone who wants to begin anything. Before you start it's that, there's always a fear of, it feels harder, it feels scary because you just haven't done it yet. So by taking the course anytime early you just kinda get that visual, you get the roadmap and you feel more comfortable. So freshman year there are fewer things to do to start preparing, but there are some days to keep in mind. It does give great advice of just simple things that kids can be doing to better themselves and to really learn about themselves as they start choosing extracurricular activities and kind of building their own story for who they are and what they're interested in.

Debbie: Well I'd actually like to take a step back and just hear about the college application process in general. I'm just curious, you know, I mean this is such a different landscape than way back in the day when I applied to college, you know, just even in the past 10 years, you know, I'm wondering if you could share any trends that you see and what are colleges looking for? Is it about having all the extracurriculars which isn't always going to be what differently wired kids are going to be doing. So what do you notice right now?

Marisa: Yeah, that's such a great question and one I love. I love that you mention, you know, when you were applying to a college and that's what I hear from a lot of parents is the fact that they have no idea what it's like anymore because it truly has changed so much. So what I've noticed and what you were kind of starting to ask about is that that kind of well rounded, should they be doing everything and this is why I wanted to speak to you about this conversation when you talk about differently wired and those kids aren't going to be doing everything the same way. And I want to try to turn that into an advantage for all these parents to help. So the one thing that I love to preach, if I'm on my soapbox for a second, is that colleges these days are actually not looking for a well rounded student or a well rounded person.

So the advice that I give is for students to be thoroughly spiky instead. And it's just kind of the visual that I give because I think that there is that that term well rounded that gets thrown around and parents and kids feel like the kids should

be doing everything, like they should be the best musician and an actor and president of the debate team, and captain of a sports team and on and on and on.

Debbie: And have started a nonprofit by the time they were 12.

Marisa: Exactly. Exactly. And it's just not true. Um, because kids, kids can't do everything and they can't do everything well. So what colleges find more interesting these days is the kids who really, really hone in on unique, whether it's abilities or pa-, I hate to say the word passion because I think it gets thrown around so often, but what I tell parents is to help their kids find activities or topics that really excite them.

So what does their kid talk about and never stop? What do they research all day? What do they want to participate in all day? That just truly is something that they're interested in and not just doing the things to do the things. And then once they find that, you know, whether it's an interest in reptiles or an interest in, it could be a sport, it could be anything, but to take that and expand on that specific thing. So if it was reptiles for example, how do they get involved in a club, but maybe they take a random class outside of school that they learn more about biology. Maybe they do find an internship where they just, or shadow somebody who works in a zoo. I'm making these up and maybe they do start a fundraiser for reptiles at the, you know, their local center. Again, making all of these things up. But there's ways for kids to hone in on these specific skills and the things that excite them and then really expand that. And that's what colleges are looking for, are those kids that have found something unique and you know, spend their time on those particular subjects.

Debbie: Oh, that is nice to hear. I, you know, that, that idea of that well rounded, you know, that is the word and I think maybe 5, 10 years ago, that's what I kept reading so much about is you know, these kids who get perfect SAT scores and they are the captain of the math club and you know, they did their service trips to Sub-saharan Africa. They'd have all these things and they still can't get into the schools they want to get into. What's the competition like? And I'm wondering, tell us more about that competition in relation to the, some of the advantages actually that differently wired kids have stepping into that process.

Marisa: Yeah. So you know, the, the grades of the standardized tests are always going to be a really important part of that. Um, but when you think about any school, you know, there's, there's this range of students who get in. So if your kid is interested in a particular college, you can usually, almost every school go to their actual website and it'll give a range of percentiles of the grades and the SAT or ACT scores that students have. And it's a range for a reason. Like if it was a cut off of a certain point, then they, they would say that. But the reason there's a range is that, um, you know, there are kids with perfect scores, perfect GPA's as you mentioned, who don't get in. And that's usually because they don't have an interesting story to tell. Or perhaps a teacher had something bad to say about them or they just have no leadership or just are uninvolved really is, is kind of the greatest way I can say that.

And then on the flip side, there are kids who are on that lower score of grades or tests who do get in and that's because they really stand out in other ways. So I love, you know, with differently wired kids and why it can be an advantage is sometimes they have a unique passion or maybe they're helping other kids who were in their similar situation or they just have a really unique view in the world. And if they can hone that story and the experiences that they've had to overcome. Colleges are really looking for students who can overcome adversity, who can face challenges and still find their path in the world and add value. So the greater impact that kids can have, um, you know, whether it's in their community or with kids who are similar to them and make a difference. Learning for themselves, helping others, that's what colleges are really ultimately looking for. So the competition, it is tough these days, but there are so many, you know, the other point that I want to say is there are so many fabulous schools out there. That, you know, what I also really encourage kids to do is find the schools that are going to be the perfect fit for them, where they're really going to love it and fit in and find people who are similar to them and ultimately they're going to thrive more so in the world when they do that.

Debbie: How do they find those schools? You know, again, I see friends on Facebook taking their kids on college tour, you know, like we're doing the East Coast college tours now and I'm like, oh my goodness. My Dad was like, you're going to Penn State because that's where I went, that's where your sister went, it's where your mom went. Right? And it's good enough for you. It was like, okay, I'm going to Penn State. So, but I love this idea of finding the place that's actually a perfect fit or really good fit for our values and our sensibilities and our, and our skillset as opposed to the mystique around some of these schools or, you know, the best engineering school or the best of this school. So how do we, how do we encourage our kids to even discover what those places might be?

Marisa: Yeah. So inside of my course I have this worksheet that leads parents like step by step through this process. And I start by kind of reverse engineering this. So a lot of people will think, okay, there's all these schools out there where do we want to be, what kind of campus do we want? Um, and they start just looking at the school. And what I encourage parents to help their kids do is take a step back. So if you think about it, um, if you ask parents or any kid why they want to go to college, the answer is usually to get a job. And it's kind of a step that a lot of people skip when they think about this because I think a lot of kids assume they have no idea what they want to do in life and, and that's totally okay and, and things change as they go through it, but it's really important to at least try to have something in mind of what kind of career or maybe job might they want to have one day based on their interests.

And if we go back maybe just to give the example of the reptiles that we talked about earlier, maybe it's really important to have, um, you know, if they want to work in a zoo one day or as a marine biologist or something like that. Um, then once they have that in mind, they'll start to work through, okay to be a marine biologist they should probably have a great biology program. Right? And so then you at least have something to go by and say, okay, now we're going to look at schools based on biology programs. And then you can start to look at another

worksheet that I have inside my course that asks a bunch of questions that, that I didn't think to ask when I was looking through colleges. And that's why I love to share these. And some examples might be how far from home do they want to be, if they want to be in driving distance or a flight away or get home in an hour or 15 minutes, do they want a big school or a small school?

What kind of professors do they want? What kind of internship programs should be offered? Um, you know, does the geography matter or um, you know, the list goes on and on. But basically it kind of throughout my course will really help parents to hone in and back into the right schools. So by the time you answer all these questions, all of a sudden, and then I give you tools that help you search for the schools, all of a sudden it's like, okay, there's maybe 20 schools instead of 500 that might be a good fit. And then you can start to really kind of apply those filters and as you mentioned, I do always recommend you don't have to go on a whole east coast tour, but once you kind of have those schools in mind to really start visiting some campuses because once they do that, they're really going to get a feel for, okay, I like this big school but I dislike the small schools or vice versa. And um, I like this campus and sometimes it just really takes walking onto a campus for a kid to feel that feeling in their gut like this is the place for me. And you really can't replace that just from, you can get an idea online, but ultimately stepping foot on campus is a great way to, to really understand once you've narrowed it down.

Debbie: Okay that's great. It seems like a very logical process which I really appreciate. And that, even just having that structure to it makes it feel less, less overwhelming. So I'm just wanting to ask about homeschooled kids. A lot of the families in our community are homeschooling their children. Do you have any specific thoughts or advice on how those parents can better help their kids create what they need in order to step into this application process as ready as they can be?

Marisa: Yeah. So honestly, um, I, I think that my online course is such a great tool, especially for parents who are homeschooling their kids because they don't have the college counselor or the guidance counselor to kind of give them the step by step. And other than that, um, the information that I share inside the course is going to walk them through the exact same process. And there, there is no advantage or disadvantage other than the fact that they don't have someone maybe feeding them some of the advice that other parents might get. But what I actually tell people, um, who are thinking about the course, who might even have a great college counselor, is that the college counselor's job, I think people sometimes get confused, is actually not to hold parents' hands like I do and walk them through each of the steps. A lot of times guidance counselors, their job is really making sure colleges get all the transcripts from all of the kids.

They're writing letters of recommendations for all of the kids and they're really involved in the paperwork and the relationships with the schools and not so much teaching parents how to help their kids write essays like I do or to teach their kids how to choose the right schools or those questions to ask and things. So it really is a great resource and to parents who are listening who may be homeschooling their kids, I never want you to feel like you're at a disadvantage.

And I think that it's really special and again, the story that your kid has to tell about their experience and the things that they've overcome and their interests are going to be just as qualified. So I just want to give you guys the encouragement to feel like, parents you can do this and you can help your kids and I commend you for spending the time to teach your children. And it's wonderful.

Debbie: Do you think that universities are open, you know, I'm just wondering what their, their perspective is on homeschool students is, does it depend on, on from school to school in terms of is it something they are like, yes, homeschoolers welcome, we really respect and appreciate the different opinions and experience that they bring to the table. Or are there some schools that aren't as open to that? Just curious.

Marisa: Yeah. I've never specifically heard of a school who will ever say that it's a direct disadvantage. So the only thing that's different is that colleges, um, you know, they might have a relationship with schools, they might know more about the classes that they take and you know, whether a, an AP or an honors class at a certain school is offered versus somewhere else. So it's really just, um, for college admissions officers, they'll just have a better idea of the type of classes and the caliber of work that they're doing. Um, so for parents who are homeschooling, that's really the challenge is to make sure your kid is still, you know, learning the same information and communicating to the schools the level of rigor and classes and information that they're learning and for kids to still challenge themselves and show that they're still learning difficult concepts as much as they can. And still getting involved in the community and you know, having an impact in the world still.

Debbie: Great. Okay. Thank you for that. And yeah, it's just something a lot of parents in the community are -

Marisa: Yeah, it's a great question.

Debbie: It's always in the back of your mind, because you're like am I doing what we need to do. So I want to ask you just a question about parent involvement. So you know, your course is aimed at parents and a lot of this is talking about how parents can help to prepare and to support their child through this. I'm just curious to know what your thoughts are or where you stand in terms of how much of this do you believe is really our child's responsibility? You know, I, I think I'll just say personally and, and, and this is my experience with, with all things parenting, you know, I personally do my best to, to raise my son in a way so that he does have that sense of autonomy, self-direction and independence and, and really giving him, supporting him in being able to ultimately do these things on his own. So. And then in talking with you, it sounds like a lot of this is about the parents and I'm just wondering for people who feel like that's really their kid's responsibility you know, tell me more about that. The parent involvement. What do you see as their role? What do you see as the kid's roll?

Marisa: I am so, so glad you asked that question, Debbie, because I do think it can be confusing when people hear that I have a course specifically for parents to help

them with the college admissions. Right. But I think you nailed it on the head in the way that you choose to parent and I feel absolutely the same. Is that it's ultimately up to the kid and it should be on them to do the work and to lead the process. Uh, but the reason that I aim the course towards parents and a lot of times parents will actually have their kids watch along with them or watch certain lessons and certain videos and do certain worksheets together within the course. But I do it for the parents because I believe that when the parents are armed to have all the information they are then best equipped to help their kids do the work, be autonomous and succeed.

So a lot of times, you know, if kids just have the information, they don't necessarily take the initiative, they don't know the questions to ask. So when parents go through the course, it's really to say, here's what you should know and here's how you can support your kid the best you can. So it will help them to you know, let's use the essays, for example, within college admissions on the applications. So kids should be writing the essays 100 percent to start, it should be their ideas, their topics, but I teach a step by step, um, lessons on each of the types of essays within the course so that parents can learn and then maybe sit down with their kid and say, okay, let's talk about the personal statement, here's the type of information that you should be sharing. Here's, here's how you brainstorm topics and kind of talk it out together so that they can, the kid can then brainstorm the right topics and talk about it together.

They can then write their own essay, but then the parents can, um, you know, look it over with an editing eye and make sure, you know, I just want to give one example of myself when I was, when I was in high school. So there's one essay called the why, we call it the why essay, and it's basically schools asking kids, why do you want to attend our college? And the first time I gave it a shot, I, I'll never forget this and I was writing, I had visited the campus and I just loved the feel of it and I was writing about the buildings and the location and just kind of how I felt and I remember my parents read over the essay and they were like, Marissa, you didn't, you know, why is this school special? What do they have to offer, what about the classes?

And it was just things that hadn't crossed my mind. I just didn't know better. So I say that example because when parents know they can then help guide their kids. But to your point, it should absolutely be on the kid to lead the process, to do the work and the parents to have the knowledge to ask the right questions and kind of guide them in the right direction.

Debbie: Oh, that's great. Okay. Thank you. That's super helpful. And I also just have to say, when I hear the word essay, I just can't even imagine that process. So, deep breath.

Marisa: Yes, yes, yes. It can be hard, but I, I, I break it down for parents with all of the information in a way that's really easy to understand and a lot of the parents I work with are just so thankful because everything that seemed very complicated, and it is a complicated process, you know, I don't like to sugar coat that, but I really do love that I'm able to talk to parents and break things down in really simple step by step directions so that everything feels way less overwhelming

and the parents really feel like, okay, I got this. I can do it and it's not so scary and the kids are going to end up in a really great place.

Debbie: I think that you are giving comfort and hope and optimism to a lot of people listening who have older kids.

Marisa: That's my number one goal.

Debbie: That's awesome. Your love for this work definitely comes through. So can you let listeners know, and again I will, I always include links on the show notes page, but just tell us the best way for parents who want to learn more about your work and connect with you, where can they find you?

Marisa: Yeah. So, um, anybody can always go to my website. It's talkcollegetome.com and there's tons of resources. There's my contact, there's a contact tab where you can send me an email, send me a note if you ever have absolutely any questions about anything. Um, I also have a really great timeline that I put together for parents. So I'll create a page if that's okay at talkcollegetome.com/tilt and for parents who are interested who, you know, as we talked about at the beginning of what do we do and when, and what are all the, what are all the steps for each year. Um, I have a timeline that I can link to there that basically breaks down kind of month by month, freshman year, sophomore year, junior year, senior year, exactly the things that parents should be thinking about and making sure their kids are doing, keeping track of deadlines or a standardized test or AP thing, anything like that. So it's a really great timeline and resource. So, um, I can share that link with you to share with parents if that's okay as well.

Debbie: Oh, I love it when guests create special pages on their website for Tilt listeners. So thank you.

Marisa: Wonderful, wonderful.

Debbie: Well, I'm going to let you get back, I know it's super late in, in Bali, but thank you so much for coming on the podcast and sharing all of this with us today.

Marisa: Thank you Debbie, for having me. And for any parents listening, I hope that this helped ease your fears and maybe even gave you a little excitement of ways to help your kids and, um, please don't hesitate to reach out. I love to help. And Debbie, I think that the work that you are doing is, is so, so fabulous. So thank you for showing up the way that you do as well.

Debbie: You've been listening to the Tilt Parenting podcast. For the show notes for this episode, including links to Marisa's website, Talk College To Me, and all the other resources we discussed, visit tiltparenting.com/session133. If you haven't had a chance to check out my new book *Differently Wired* and you want to check it out and see if it's for you, don't forget, you can download the first chapter and the table of contents at tiltparenting.com/book. And if you have read it already and you like what you read, please consider leaving a review on Amazon or Good Reads. More reviews mean more visibility for the book and of course I want to make sure the people who would benefit from its message can easily find it. Of

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RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- [Talk College to Me](#) (Marisa's website)
- [Special TiLT Parenting sign up page on Talk College to Me](#)
- [How to Navigate the High School to College Transition](#) (podcast episode)