

# International ACAC South & Central Asia Regional Institute 2026

## Finding the Right Fit & The Difficult Conversations with Parents

### PRESENTERS



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# Finding the Right Fit & The Difficult Conversations with Parents

*“When a parent’s dream and a student’s future points in different directions, whose voice guides the decision?”*



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# Activity



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## Cluster

Fear

Pride

Hope



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# What Parents Really Mean

Which emotion is underneath each statement: Fear, Pride or Hope?

**1** If she doesn't get into a top-ten university, all our sacrifices were for nothing.

**2** We have never had anyone from our family study abroad. He will be the first.

**3** What will people say if he doesn't go to a famous college?

**4** I just want her to be happy and find something she loves.

**5** Her cousin got into Oxford, so why can't she?

**6** He has worked so hard these four years. He deserves the best.

**7** What if he goes abroad and cannot cope on his own?

**8** I know she can do more than her marks show.

**9** Is this university even worth the fees? What will the job prospects be?

**10** We don't want him to have fewer options than we had.

**11** She has grown so much in these years, and I want her to keep growing.

**12** Please tell me honestly, is my child good enough?



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# What Parents Really Mean

Sort each parent statement by the emotion underneath

## FEAR

- 1 If she doesn't get into a top-ten university, all our sacrifices were for nothing.
- 3 What will people say if he doesn't go to a famous college?
- 5 Her cousin got into Oxford, so why can't she?
- 7 What if he goes abroad and cannot cope on his own?
- 9 Is this university even worth the fees? What will the job prospects be?
- 12 Please tell me honestly, is my child good enough?

## PRIDE

- 2 We have never had anyone from our family study abroad. He will be the first.
- 6 He has worked so hard these four years. He deserves the best.
- 8 I know she can do more than her marks show.

## HOPE

- 4 I just want her to be happy and find something she loves.
- 10 We don't want him to have fewer options than we had.
- 11 She has grown so much in these years, and I want her to keep growing.



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## TAKE AWAY FROM THE ACTIVITY

- Every parent line carries a need underneath the demand.
- Most posted notes fall under Fear, so acknowledge the fear before discussing any list.
- Pride and Hope show what the family wants for the child, and you can build on them.
- Arguing about rankings, courses and brands only addresses the top of the iceberg.
- Your first sentence sets the tone: “Help me understand what worries you most.”
- Hearing the need does not mean agreeing with the demand.
- You can validate the worry and still guide the family toward a better fit.
- Bring the student’s voice into the conversation once the parent feels heard.
- Takeaway: “Respond to the need, not the demand.”



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### **Demand and need**

Every parent line carries a need underneath the demand.

### **Tip of the iceberg**

Arguing about rankings, courses and brands only addresses the tip.

## **The demand**

### **The need**

**Fear**

**Pride**

**Hope**

Most posted notes: Fear

### **Name the fear first**

Most posted notes fall under Fear. Acknowledge it before discussing any list.

### **Set the tone**

Your first sentence:  
"Help me understand what worries you most."

### **Pride and hope**

They show what the family wants for the child, so build on them.

### **Validate and guide**

You can validate the worry and still guide the family toward a better fit.

### **Hear, don't concede**

Hearing the need does not mean agreeing with the demand.

### **Student's voice**

Bring the student's voice into the conversation once the parent feels heard.

**Respond to the need, not the demand.**



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# CASE STUDY

## MEET AARAV, 17

A strong student. Two plausible universities. One family divided.

### THE PARENTS' CHOICE

A prestigious overseas university for economics.  
Brand recognition. Career security. A long-held family dream.

### THE STUDENT'S CHOICE

A less-known university with economics + public policy.  
Interdisciplinary learning. Closer support. Social impact.

### YOUR FIRST MOVE?

A Meet Aarav privately   B Convene a family meeting   C Compare evidence   D Explain the risks to parents

VOTE • 30 seconds | What do we still need to understand?

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# CASE STUDY

LOOK BENEATH THE CHOICE

**THE PRESENTING PROBLEM IS THE UNIVERSITY.**

THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM MAY BE...

**FEAR**

of failure or regret

**IDENTITY**

what success says about  
us

**SACRIFICE**

what the family has  
invested

**BELONGING**

where the student can  
thrive

QUESTIONS

What might Aarav be afraid to say aloud?

What assumptions did we make about his parents?

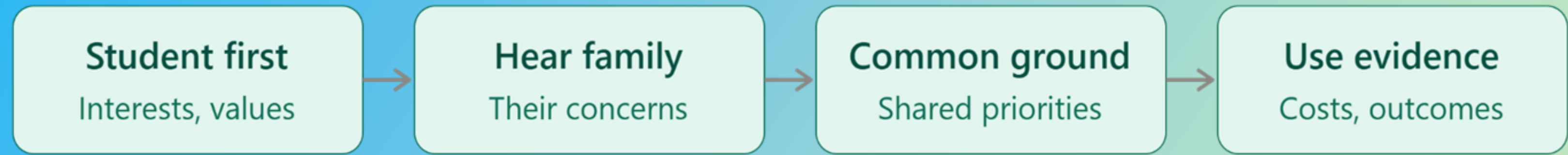
*The counsellor's first task is not to persuade. It is to understand.*

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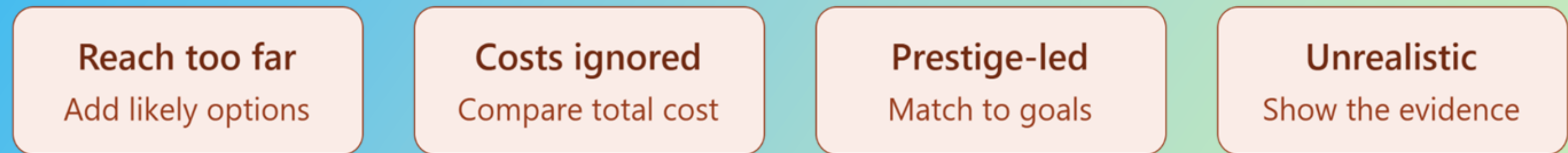


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## Guide the conversation



## When it gets difficult



# FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

## The right fit

A university where the student can thrive in four ways

### Academically

Learns and grows

### Emotionally

Feels supported

### Socially

Finds belonging

### Financially

Can afford it



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### **Academic fit**

Course, teaching, entry

### **Career fit**

Internships, pathways

### **Financial fit**

Fees, costs, scholarships

### **Right fit**

Student thrives

### **Personal fit**

Culture, location, support

### **Admission fit**

Reach, target, likely

### **Future fit**

Goals and flexibility



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**What families often ask**

**What universities look for**

Is it ranked high?

Does the course match?

Will it guarantee a job?

Outcomes and support

Why was my child declined?

Readiness and motivation

Can we get an exception?

Fair, consistent criteria

**Shared goal: a student who enrolls, stays and succeeds**



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