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EARLY DECISION: WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU BACK OUT?



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Early Decision (ED) is a very appealing application option. Students who apply early decision know their admission decision before the New Year and, if accepted, they are set free from the grueling college application process. For many students, knowing their college plans as soon as possible is a huge relief. Applying early decision is very tempting; however, students must be cognizant of that to which they are agreeing.

The early decision application is a binding contract where, by signing the agreement, a student is committing to enroll at a first-choice institution if accepted and then withdraw all applications to other schools. Not only does the student sign the agreement, her parents and school counselor do as well.

This is not a decision to be made lightly. A student should only apply ED if she is 100% certain that this school is her dream school and the best possible match for her.

But what if a student changes his mind? What if he gets accepted to another school that he wanted to attend instead? What if the school does not offer a feasible financial aid package? He signed an agreement. He has to attend that school, right? Well, it depends.

Contrary to popular belief, it is possible to break an ED agreement. However, this is only possible in certain situations. If a student backs out of her ED agreement for reasons not deemed acceptable by the school, there could be some very serious consequences.

Whether or not a student can surrender his early decision agreement is contingent upon the student's circumstance and the school in which he was admitted. The only valid reason universally accepted across all early decision schools is if the financial aid package offered does not make attendance possible. If a student cannot afford to attend the school, then he will be allowed to decline the offer of admission and be released from the early decision agreement. Schools will often allow students to break their ED commitment if there is an extreme personal or family matter, such as a sick parent. In these cases, there are no repercussions for backing out of the agreement.



The early decision agreement is essentially a “gentleman’s agreement” and schools expect students to hold up their end of the deal. Some students may decline their admission offer because they simply changed their mind and no longer wish to attend that institution. Now, most schools will not go after a student for tuition, but they could. Most of the time, they will let students walk away without holding them financially responsible; however, they may put that student’s reputation on the line. Some schools share their list of students who have backed out of their ED commitment without an acceptable reason to the other schools to which they applied. By doing so, students could be blacklisted where other institutions do not want to reward a student for deceiving a fellow institution or not being a student of integrity.

If a student is considering applying early decision, it is important to make certain that the school is her dream school and her confidence in that decision cannot be shaken. Before they apply, students should also contact the financial aid office to get an idea what their financial aid package will look like. If a student wants to apply early to schools but is not willing to commit to one school, look for schools that offer early action plans. This application plan will offer an admissions decision around the same time as early decision option but is non-binding.

Remember: If you are committing to the early decision agreement, do not take it lightly—your wallet and your reputation may be on the line.

Tags: [college](#) [early decision](#) [Kristin Schmidt](#)



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