



Parent's Guide to College Visits

How to Plan, What to Ask, and
What to Look For

3/19/2026



College visits work best when you plan for “fit,” not just a tour

What you’ll leave with today:

- A simple plan for any college visit
- Questions to ask
- How to debrief with your teen

Core takeaways: Do your research. Go beyond the campus tour. It’s all about fit.



Use this 3-part framework: Before, During, After

A clear structure to help you and your teen gather evidence not just impressions.



Before

Clarify priorities +
plan the day



During

Observe + ask +
collect evidence



After

Debrief + decide
next step

Before you go: Do the research that makes the visit smarter

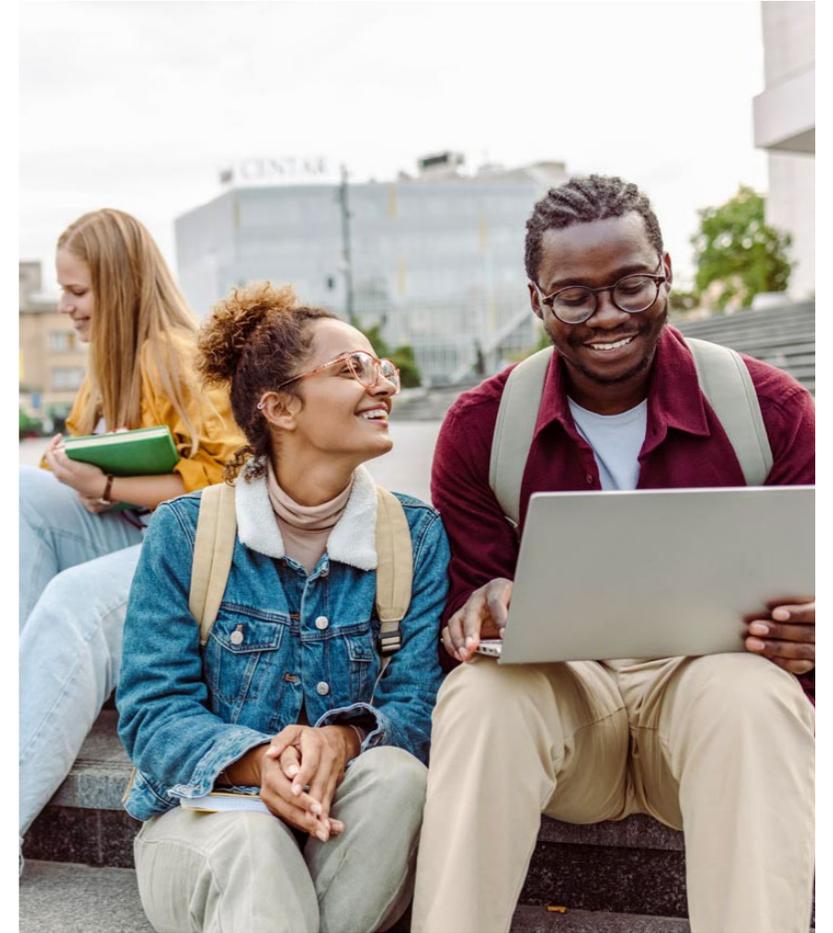
You don't need to know everything, but a few priorities go a long way.

Research essentials:

- Review majors, academic structure (i.e. semesters, quarters, etc.), and any non-negotiables
- Scan student life basics: housing, clubs, weekends, campus feel
- Identify services: advising tutoring, wellness, accessibility, career
- Safety: alert systems, transportation



Tip: Create a phone note with big takeaways and questions to ask based on your research.



Use College Search on BigFuture.org to prep

1 Search and save schools you're considering

2 Review majors, student life, and cost basics

3 Write out questions based on what you learn

4 Get those questions answered on campus



Scan the QR code to explore College Search on BigFuture.org



Fordham University

Bronx, NY

Save College

Overview

Admissions

Academics

Costs

Campus Life

Overview

Type
4-year • Private

Campus Life
Large • Urban

Average Per Year After Aid
\$45K

SAT Range
1340–1470

Graduation Rate
83%

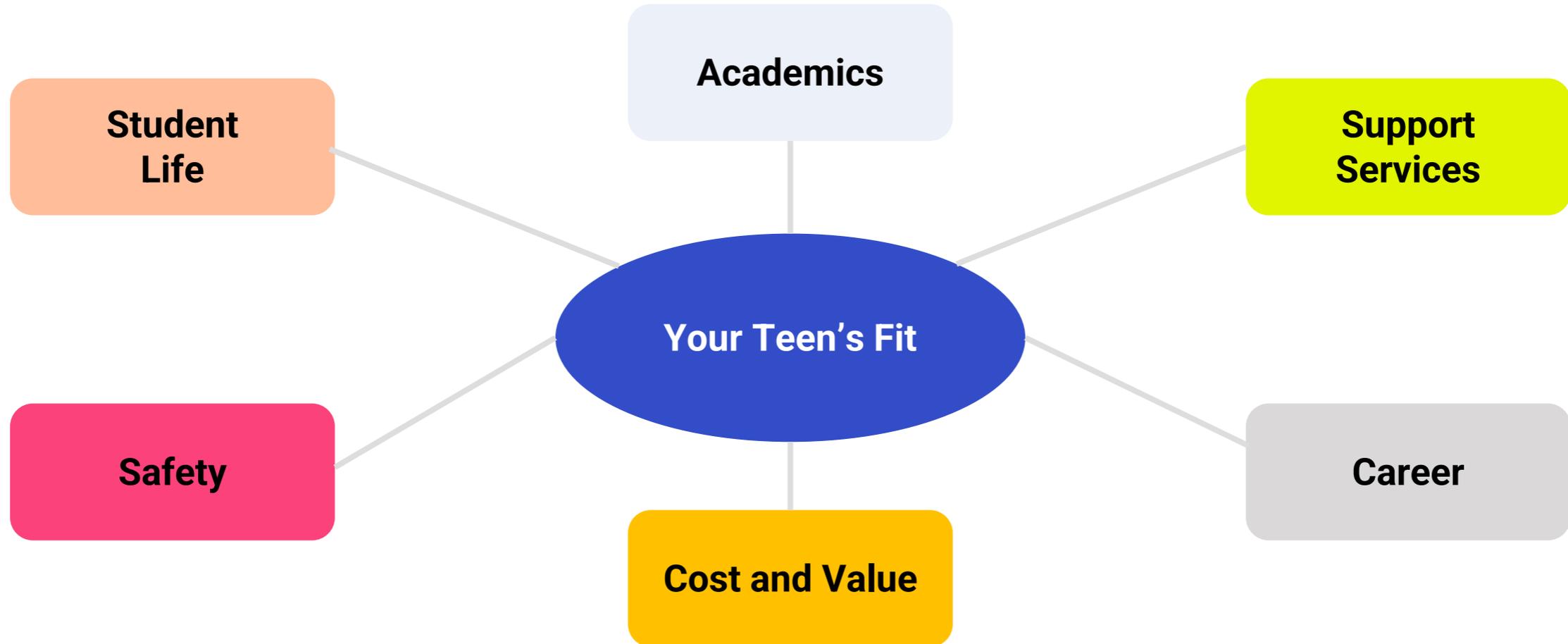


Need advice on which colleges to add to your list?

UPchieve's college advisors are waiting to

What to Consider to Find Your Teen's Fit

Fit isn't a vibe, it's evidence across a few key areas.



Success indicators: graduation rates + post-graduation employment



Observe



Verify



Collect

During the visit: Make the most of the tour

OBSERVE:

- What are students doing between classes?
- How active and energetic is campus?
- Are students studying in public spaces? socializing? rushing? relaxed?

VERIFY:

Check whether what you read online matches daily reality on campus.

COLLECT: Write down names of offices, people, and resources so you can follow up later with questions.

Go beyond the tour: Add on to the visit, if you can

An extra experience can turn a generic visit into a test of fit.

- Sit in on a class or visit an academic department
- Visit the academic support center (tutoring, writing, advising)
- Visit the career services office
- Eat at the dining hall
- Check out the residence halls (if accessible)
- Walk the surrounding area (day + evening if possible)
- Talk to students on campus and ask them about their experience



If you can't travel, there are virtual options:

- Attend an online info session
- Take the virtual tour
- Explore the surrounding area on maps
- Admissions rep visiting your area/school
- Contact the admission office questions

Screenshot this: Questions to ask

Pick questions that match your teen's priorities

Academics

- How accessible are professors outside class (office hours, email, advising)?
- What happens if a student is struggling in an intro course?

Support services

- Which support services are used most, and how do students access them?
- What's the process for accommodations or mental health support?

Affordability

- Who helps families understand aid packages and what's the best way to contact them?
- What costs surprise families most in year one?

Student life

- What do students do on a typical weeknight and weekend?
- How do first-year students find community especially if they're quieter or not into Greek life?

Safety

- How do students get home at night (shuttles, escorts, lighting, apps)?
- How do alerts work, and what's the relationship with local police/city services?

Career

- How does career services engage students in their first year?
- What percent of students do internships/research, and how do they find opportunities?

After the visit: Debrief with your teen and take the next steps

Debrief shortly after the visit (even on the way home)

- How did that feel?
- What surprised you?
- Where did you feel you belonged? Where didn't you?
- What questions do you still have?
- What's our next step?
 - Another visit
 - A virtual session,
 - An email or call to an office



Visit the BigFuture Parent
Community for More
Resources:



Key takeaways



Do your research

Get info on academics, student life, campus life, support services, safety, career, cost and outcomes. Use College Search on BigFuture.org to get started.



Go beyond the campus tour

Observe what's happening on campus, verify what you're seeing matches what you saw online, and collect info to follow-up on. Sit in on a class, talk to students or add an extra experience...it's worth it.



It's all about fit

Think about your teen's unique needs, goals and strengths. Debrief after the visit.