



Liz Doe Stone, Ph.D.
CEO, Top Tier Admissions
@drlizstone



Entering Your College Era?

★ FEBRUARY 2–FEBRUARY 6 ★

In honor of **National School Counseling Week**, we asked a seasoned advisor to share her smart, practical tips for kicking off the college process with your teenager.

Visiting colleges is one of my favorite parts of the application process. There’s something grounding about stepping onto a campus and getting a glimpse of what your child’s next chapter might look like. While it’s easy to get caught up in logistics, the real magic happens in the small human moments. Here are five tips I share with families to help every college visit feel purposeful and personal.

Look Beyond Majors to Understand the School’s Culture

Before you arrive, take time to get to know the school’s mission, academic strengths, and quirky traditions. Once you’re there, shift gears:

Pay attention to how the campus feels. Stroll the main area, watch how students interact, and notice whether the energy seems collaborative, creative, laid-back, or buzzing. Campus visits teach teens as much about themselves—their

emerging preferences, priorities, and nonnegotiables—as they do about schools.

Don’t Forget: Colleges Are Paying Attention Too

Many schools track “demonstrated interest,” a measure of each prospective student’s engagement. Did they attend an info session, take a tour, or follow up thoughtfully? Showing up matters, and visits give teens useful material for their “Why This College?” essays. Some of the strongest essays I’ve read include

mention of memorable moments like a conversation with a tour guide, a poster in the student center, or a surprising detail in the dining hall.

Plan Ahead to Use Your Time Well

Most campus visits follow the same rhythm: a 45- to 60-minute info session and a 60- to 90-minute walking tour. Spring dates fill up fast, so register early. Look for opportunities that align with your teen’s interests—touring the engineering school, sitting in on a class. And don’t skip “safer” options: Seeing a balanced mix of schools helps clarify the full landscape.

Notice Small Signals While You’re There

Many useful insights come from details that

aren’t part of the official tour. Are faculty office hours posted on doors? Do students seem happy or stressed? Do people hold doors open for one another? These tiny indicators often tell you more than a brochure.

Capture Impressions Right Away

When you’ve seen a few campuses, they’ll start to blur together. Encourage your teen to jot down reflections as soon as you’re back in the car: *What felt inspiring? What felt off? Can I see myself contributing to this community?* Following the school on Instagram or TikTok can clarify the day-to-day vibe. And a simple thank-you email to a tour guide or admissions rep not only is gracious but also reinforces demonstrated interest.