

10 tips for Therapeutic School Visits

An onsite visit will help you evaluate whether a therapeutic program suits your child.

1 Learn about the program before you visit.

Read materials from the program and check out their website. If you are visiting more than one on a particular day, refresh your memory about that school just before you arrive. Be sure to spend at least a half-day at each program. You should have a chance to meet with the executive director and members from the admission, clinical, education, and residential life teams. Ask what accreditations and licenses the program and staff have.

2 What is the typical student profile? Ask what other programs clients often visit when considering this program. Find out how many students this program serves.

Evaluate the environment of the campus.

Is the campus located in a rural or metropolitan area? Decide if the environment feels safe and secure, and if it is clean and organized. Look at bedrooms, bathrooms, and the kitchen area. Sit in on classes and check out the library or other on-campus resources. Notice the rapport between students and faculty in the program. Learn about the policy on technology use. If your student is over the age of 18, what are local educational or employment opportunities and policies?

4 Assess the academic program. Ask questions that help you clarify the academic program and the type of student who is most comfortable and successful there.

Find out if learning support or accommodations are available. Ask if there is homework. See if they have a list of boarding schools and college acceptances.

5 Look into life beyond academics. Check out the athletic facilities, theater, and student center.

Read the notices posted in the dorms or on bulletin boards. Request to speak to students (if appropriate). Take advantage of the opportunity to ask questions about campus life. Eat lunch in the student center and watch student interactions.

IECA⁺

6 Examine the clinical philosophy.

Find out how often the students receive therapy (individual, group, and family). Ask about the theoretical framework undergirding the program; about the model of treatment; and how the staff is trained. Look into the crisis intervention model that is used. Ask if there is a clinical director on campus and how often the psychiatrist is on campus. Is there a nurse on staff? Look into the policy on medication administration.

7 Check out the level of parental involvement.

Ask if they offer parent workshops; how often the parents must attend; and the visitation policy.

8 Ask if the program collects data on their alumni success. If so, find out if it is available for review and if the program participates in research or data collection.

9 Write down your impressions of each program you visit. After a while, the visions of different programs start to blur if you don't immediately stop to record your thoughts. Also consider taking some photos to help you keep track of the campuses you visit (please avoid taking pictures of students).

10 What is the cost? Ask if there are any additional financial obligations other than monthly tuition and if they offer financial aid.

Also find out if they provide someone to help with insurance, what their recent experience is with insurance covering some of the cost, and if school systems ever cover part of the cost.

IECA member consultants who specialize in therapeutic placements have extensive experience with mental health diagnoses, adolescent behaviors, substance abuse, emotional disabilities, and learning differences. They are able to help families during a time of crisis and offer support and direction to recommend the best intervention and solution.