

SPECIAL REPORT: COLLEGE VISITS

learning curve



PROSPECTIVE PUSH
ACCORDING TO A RECENT STUDY, 39.1 PERCENT OF TEENS WHO WENT ON AN OVERNIGHT VISIT REPORTED DRINKING, USING DRUGS, OR ENGAGING IN SEXUAL ACTIVITY.

Campus visits give high schoolers a taste of college—but sometimes things get out of hand.

When Sarah* was a high school junior, she went on an overnight visit to a small college in Connecticut. She was being wooed by the school's squash team and was anxious to get the full experience. "I thought I was supposed to go with the flow," the now-21-year-old from Philadelphia says.

So when her host, a senior on the team, suggested they go to a friend's party, Sarah was quick to agree. "It sounded fun," she recalls, "but then we got in the car and drove for close to 45 minutes. We ended up at a party at her friend's off-campus house, which I totally wasn't prepared for. I was only seventeen!"

Sarah isn't alone in her experience. According to a study from Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) and Liberty Mutual Group, 39.1 percent of teens who have gone on an overnight college visit report drinking, using drugs, or engaging in sexual activity during their stay—with 12.4 percent engaging in all three. An overnight visit can give a more rounded view into student life and is an important part of the application process, but unexpected social pressures can sometimes derail good intentions. Most admissions departments have strict no-alcohol policies for campus visits and ▶

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put together a roster of activities to provide a fun, safe stay for prospective students. But things *can* get out of hand. In 2005, eighteen-year-old Lance Strickland died from complications associated with alcohol poisoning after a casual overnight stay with football players at Oregon State University, and in 2004, the University of Colorado came under fire when several women claimed they were raped or assaulted at parties held during football-recruiting visits.

During Sarah's fateful visit, she stayed at the party until her host took her to a local bar, where she used another student's ID to get in. "I was pretty uncomfortable, but I just wanted to fit in with everyone," Sarah says. "By the time we left, I was bombed—I could barely walk and my host put me in a stranger's car. It was scary."

"When I was a high school senior, I stayed overnight at a school that I thought I wanted to attend," says Maya,* 22, from San Francisco. "The kids in the dorm decided they wanted to throw a pre-

ILLICIT ENTICEMENT?

Prevalence of using sex as a recruiting tool up for debate

District Attorney Mary Keenan said in a deposition in a civil suit filed by three women who say they were raped by play-

school's recruits on recruiting weekends. "I don't think schools use sex to get recruits," Leach said. "But it may periodically happen... not that it's well-advised between a recruit and some girl he sees on a visit, just like with any high school kid who goes out of town or to the... But I don't think it's anybody taking control out of the way to en-

“No one said I had to drink, but I just wanted to fit in”
—Sarah,* now 21

frosh party, basically just to get me drunk, even though it was a Monday night. I felt pressure to drink, had no real control in the situation, and was tired and upset by the time I had my admissions interview the next morning.”

Despite the potential pitfalls, there are some practical steps you can take to ensure you have a positive visit. Brian Glassberg, a counselor at John P. Stevens High School in Edison, New Jersey, tells his students to view visits as an assignment, not a vacation. "Treat it as though you're a boss interviewing the school," he says. When you meet your host, ask if you can also meet the dorm's resident advisor, suggests Maya. "Get her cell-phone number from the admissions office, because she's someone who has gone through an application process and training," she says. Plus, if you can, stay with someone you know and have spent time with, to help ensure your boundaries will be respected.

After her bad visit, Sarah decided not to attend the college in Connecticut. "But a girl I know who checked out the school that same weekend had a much more reasonable stay than I did," she says. "Most visits end up great—as long as you're prepared." —RACHEL BERTSCHE
*Names have been changed.