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How to Prepare for College: Advice for Teens with Autism

Going from the comfort of your own home-where every single thing is extremely familiar, to a completely different living space-where every single thing is brand new, can certainly be challenging for any soon-to-be college freshman.

To make sure this monumental transition is a smooth one, it's necessary to put certain tools and strategies in place. And for teens with autism, mastering these strategies is especially important.

As a teen with autism on the cusp of heading to college, I've already begun to do some prep work of my own. Here are a few key tips that I think will be a big help to any young person with autism whose sights are set on college:

Know What to Expect: Visit the campus *multiple times*. One walk around campus is hardly enough to familiarize yourself with the ins and outs of brand new territory. Before going to campus, check it out online and print out a map for yourself. Study the map and campus photos that they offer online. That way, when you do visit campus, you will already have an idea about the campus layout, and it won't seem foreign to you.

For each visit, make a list of where you want to go, who to talk to and what to do (a guided tour, for instance). Walking around campus several different times prior to the start of school will allow you to gain confidence and familiarity with your new territory. Then, when you do start college, you will know what to expect from your new home.

Visuals: Before you visit campus, print out pictures of each part of campus (from the website) and post them around your room. When you actually visit campus, take pictures while you're there. Take photos of the different buildings, cafeterias, libraries, dorms and the student union. Then when you get home, print these pictures out and post them in your room, replacing them with the ones from online. In this way, campus will start to [feel familiar](#) and more like home to you. Visuals are a great way for teens with autism to grasp new concepts and ideas.

Research Resources: Do plenty of your own [research](#) on all academic and support centers that the college campus provides. Having a solid handle on the resources available to you before you start college, will benefit you tremendously. Be sure to ask about resources on your college visits as well. Make sure you print out and receive copies of all resources so that you can start a binder for the resources you accumulate. In this way, you will have a concrete reference of what is available to you when you need it.

4. Organizing Your Dorm Room: The best advice for dorm room preparation is to visit an actual dorm room that a college student currently occupies. When you visit campus, ask to see a few rooms. In this way, you can get a feel for the approximate size of the dorm rooms. Don't be shy. Talk to current students in the dorms to find out about essential items. And remember, you won't have much room for storage. So, be prepared to utilize every inch of space available, including the space [under your bed](#) and in your closet. By using crates of varying sizes, desk organizers, closet organizers, and containers, you'll be able to maximize your space. And when your room is neat and organized, you'll feel less anxious in your new home.

Often, new environments and situations are overwhelming for young people with autism, myself included. For a long time I considered going to a college in my hometown so that I could stay at home with my parents for precisely that reason. But after much consideration and consulting with my parents and teachers, I decided I didn't want to deny myself the full college experience. My hope is that these planning and prep tips will help me acclimate to college without any problems, and if you're planning on going to college, I hope they're a big help to you as well!

***Kathleen Carter** is a teen who has been living with Asperger's Syndrome for as long as she can remember. She strives to educate her peers and others about AS. Recently, she began focusing her efforts on writing proudly about how her experiences differ from other people her age. She is so grateful to have the opportunity to write for [EducatorLabs](#).*