

Mary Miele ([00:03](#)):

Welcome to Be Evolved, a podcast for parents and educators who prioritize developing possibility and expansion within the total educational process for themselves and their children or students. We invite you to listen to the podcast with your child or student in mind and with yourself at the center of the learning experience. Ultimately, our goal is to bridge the gap between educational expertise and research, translating it into practical action. Gaining knowledge plus taking action is what it means to be evolved.

Sophie Roberts ([00:40](#)):

Hi, I'm Sophie Roberts, a school placement advisor and writing specialist at Evolved. Today, I'm going to talk about private nursery through high school spring tours and how to approach them, what you should be doing before, during, and after each one. I want to start by sharing an anecdote about a family I worked with last year who reached out to me in late April after they had been on three spring tours. The family was thoughtful, organized, and doing all the right things. They had a robust and varied list of schools, spreadsheets, and timelines, and they started touring in the spring. After their third spring tour, the mom called me and said, "I don't know what's happening, but every school feels the same." And I hear that all the time. That is why when we work with families that evolved, we don't just advise that they go on spring tours, but we work with them to make the most of this early opportunity to assess the fit of the school through the lens of their child.

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Most families walk into school tours thinking they're going to look at schools. They think they're evaluating buildings, maybe peeking into classrooms, checking out the science lab, and noticing the art on the walls. And that is certainly a component of a spring tour, but not at the heart of what is actually happening. What's really happening is that you're stepping into a living, breathing ecosystem and trying to answer a much more important question. "Can my child thrive here?" And spring is the best time to do that. Spring is a time when schools are just being themselves. Teachers are deep into the curriculum, students are settled, the energy is authentic. You feel these things. You experience something that cannot be substituted by a website, a reputation, someone else's opinion, or playground, and social media chatter. So when this family came to me feeling stuck, we didn't add more schools.

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We didn't change their list. We changed how they were approaching the tours. I gave them these three simple shifts, three actionable strategies that completely changed everything for them. The first was this, prepare before you walk in. Most families don't do this. They show up, they listen, they try to absorb everything in real time, and it's overwhelming. So I told them before every tour, take just a little bit of time to understand the school. Look at their core values, not just the words, but what do those words actually mean? Because every school says things like community, curiosity, and excellence. But how these qualities manifest can look very different. Pay attention to the language you see on the website and look up any terminology you may not know and what those words mean within the context of education. Words like multimodal, student-centered, culturally responsive, inquiry-based, standardized curriculum, content mastery, and more.

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When you observe what is happening in the classroom, you can think about connecting it to what you have already learned about educational approaches. And should these words be used on the tour, you will be able to follow what is being said more easily. Next, know the dress code or lack thereof at the school. It sounds simple, but it tells you about the culture. Is it formal? Is it very relaxed? Is it somewhere in between? Consider the dress code as you show up for the tour. Lastly, before you go, take a few minutes to look at the head of school, read their bio, read something they've written, because leadership shapes culture. When you walk into the school building already familiar with these things, something shifts.

You're no longer just taking in information, you're connecting dots. They say they value curiosity. Do I actually see that in the classrooms?

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They say they value community. Does the school feel warm and connected? And suddenly the tour becomes much more meaningful. As the family I worked with started doing this, something else changed too. They stopped asking, "Is this a good school or even is this an excellent school?" "Because all the schools they were touring were good schools. Instead, they started asking a better question. "Is this a good school for my child?" And that's where everything shifted. So as they walked through the halls, they weren't just noticing what looked impressive. They were noticing things like how students move through the space. Do they seem engaged or just compliant? How do teachers respond to questions? Is there warmth? Is there flexibility? Is there responsiveness? What is happening in the halls cafeteria and during unstructured moments? What does the energy feel like? Because every school has a rhythm. Some are fast-paced, high pressure and intense.

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Some are calm and deeply nurturing. Some are highly structured. Some are more flexible. None of these are better or worse. They're just different. The question is, where does your child fit within that? The second shift I gave them was this. Understand that you are part of the experience too. Tours are not passive, they are relational. I told them, "Be on time or even better, be a few minutes early. Walk in calmly, be present, introduce yourself, engage in conversation because the school is getting to know you at the same time you're getting to know them. And after each visit, follow up. Just a simple thank you note. If you have a child applying to middle or high school, they should send one as well. It doesn't need to be long or formal, just thoughtful. Something that reflects that you were paying attention and that you appreciated the time.

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The mom I worked with later said to me that not only was she able to differentiate schools more, but that she experienced school tours completely differently. She felt more confident and more connected. And that's exactly the point because this process is not just about evaluation, it's about belonging. The third shift was about what happens after the tour, because here's the mistake almost everyone makes. Even if they jotted down notes on the tour about what was being said, they didn't take time to synthesize what they experienced after the tour. They simply say, "I liked or didn't like this school," and they move on. And by the third or fourth school, just like what had happened with this family, everything blurs together. The same language, the same polished messaging, the same smiling faces. So I told this family, "As soon as you leave before you even start the car or head to the train, take out your notebook or open the notes section of your phone.

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Write down everything. What did you notice? Who did you meet? What stood out? What felt good? What didn't? And most importantly, can you actually picture your child here? Not in an abstract way, but really picture them walking those hallways, sitting in those classrooms, interacting with those teachers. Because that first reaction, that instinct is data and it's incredibly valuable. And it also reminded them of something that I want all families to hear. A tour is not the full picture. It is not the decision. It is a starting point. You're going to have more conversations, more interactions, more opportunities to go deeper. And that's a good thing because this process should take time. By the end of the spring, the mom said to me, "I get it now. The schools don't all feel the same anymore. And more importantly, the family felt clear about next steps, not overwhelmed, not reactive, but grounded in what they were seeing and feeling." And that's really the goal because when we talk about school fit it evolved, we're not just talking about academics, we're talking about the whole child, how they learn, where they feel confident, where they need support, and how that aligns with the environment a school actually provides because the school can be incredible.

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But if it's not aligned with your child, it's not the right place. And this is why spring tours matter so much. They give you time, time to reflect, time to compare, time to revisit, time to make decisions based on clarity, not pressure. So that when decisions do come out, you're not scrambling to figure out what feels right. You already know. So if you take anything from this, it's the following. A school tour is not about checking a box. It's about gathering one of the most important pieces of information in this entire process. It's where information meets intuition, where observation meets reflection, where you move from what are the options to where does my child belong? And when you approach it in that way, you stop chasing the best school and you start finding the right one.

Mary Miele [\(09:16\)](#):

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