



Cross-Cultural Experiences

Tips and Guidelines for a successful
Host Family/Student homestay

Host Family Manual

Dear American Host Family,

On behalf of Educational Resource Development Trust (ERDT) enVision, we welcome and thank you for your decision to host a cultural exchange participant. This is a unique opportunity for you to experience first-hand the richness and diversity of a culture different from your own. Through this program, you are among thousands of American Families who volunteer to serve as citizen ambassadors of the United States. The good will of American host families in opening their homes to these young international visitors is essential to the success of the program.

The health, safety and well-being of the young people who participate are, collectively, our highest priority. A host family has many responsibilities, the most important of which is the care of a young person from a foreign country during their involvement in a cultural exchange program. The foreign student is a guest in your home and in our country and you may be the first "real Americans" they encounter. How you interact with this student will create a powerful image about our country and its people.

We hope this will be a positive and rewarding experience for you and the exchange student. It is extremely important that you notify your EPC if you have any concerns or questions.

In the following pages, your Exchange Program Coordinator (EPC) has attached all the information pertinent to your program. Please, make sure that you read it carefully.

We are truly appreciative of your kindness and generosity in making this educational and cultural experience possible. We look forward to sharing this adventure with you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Tracy M. Gautier". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Tracy M. Gautier
Director
ERDT enVision

The Introduction
"Getting to know your student and helping them acclimate"

1. Be flexible—anything can happen with flights.
2. Call your EPC if something occurs to prevent you from arriving at the welcome party or pick-up spot-on time. In this way your student understands that an emergency occurred and that they were not "forgotten".
3. Remember to make a Welcome sign for each of your students! It will make the student feel special and is a nice keepsake for them.
4. Culturally, we hug when we first meet a special someone. Keep in mind, some cultures may feel uncomfortable with this kind of physical contact.
5. Expect students to be excited but possibly quiet after arrival. Remember, they may have been traveling for over 24 hours. Don't be upset if they do not talk much.
6. When they get to your home, give them a brief tour of your home, their room, and the bathroom they will be using. Show them how to use the bathroom—toilet and shower. Don't forget minor details like which side of the tub the shower curtain goes on when the water is running unless you don't mind a flood in your bathroom! Tell them where clean towels are and where dirty laundry goes. Ask them if they would like to freshen up (take a shower or just wash their face and hands).
7. Ask them if they are hungry. We have found that a light meal works best. Maybe soup or a simple sandwich (ham or turkey are usually safe) on a roll, or fresh fruit.
8. At bedtime (probably shortly after they arrive home) make sure they know that we sleep between the top and bottom sheets on the bed. Explain what pillow shams are and that they are to be removed from the bed when sleeping. If you have central heating or air, make sure they know this and tell them not to open the windows.

TOPICS FOR IMMEDIATE DISCUSSION

1. Jet Lag & Health Concerns

- Expect irregular sleeping and eating patterns.
- Ask about stomach upsets, including diarrhea or constipation and be prepared to offer medication or advice as you would to your own children.
- Ask about any medications (prescription & non-prescription) your student may use.
- Girls may need help buying feminine products soon after arrival – good to have some supplies on hand and be clear about proper disposal of feminine products.

2. Silence & Conversation

- Talking is the American way of being comfortable with strangers. The general rule is that the closer the relationship, the more comfortable Americans are with silence.
- Make sure you initiate conversation by asking simple questions like what your student's parents do for work, what are the student's favorite subjects in school, etc.
- Share pictures from your last vacation or share a family photo album.

3. Personal Space, Privacy and Property

- In other cultures, parents and children do not spend a lot of time together after school. It is not unusual for a teenager to spend most of the time in their bedroom with the door closed, listening to music or doing homework, without much interaction with the adults of his/her family.
- Your children may be excited to have a new member of the family. They may want to spend a lot of time with the participant. Keep in mind this may become overwhelming, especially if they do not have younger siblings. Talk to your student, be understanding and help your participant to know how to communicate their need for privacy to the younger children in the home.
- Make sure to remind them to keep all of their valuable documents, electronics and property locked in their suitcase at all times. This will protect them from inadvertent loss or damage.

4. Orientation to Your Home

Many items work differently in other countries (showers, toilets, appliances, electronic equipment) so you will want to be sure they understand how everything works – but to avoid insulting them, it is best to ask questions like “what, if anything, looks different about our bathroom?” rather than explaining things that they already understand. Some key areas to focus on would be:

- The shower, toilet, bathroom fan.
- The stove - many Europeans/Asians will be used to gas stoves. Be sure they realize that electric burners stay hot longer.
- Microwaves – they may not have one at home.
- Clothes dryers – probably don’t have one at home. Some of their clothes may not be dryer-safe, so make them responsible for telling you what cannot go into the dryer. Explain how to clean the lint trap, etc. Dry on low heat.
- Self-locking doors – probably won’t be used to this and may find themselves on the wrong side of a locked door!
- It is customary in the United States to tell guests to “help yourself”. Clearly explain to the participant what this means and that it is not impolite for them to get a snack or food without assistance.

5. Decisions about Names

It’s often difficult for students to decide what to call their host parents. Discuss it openly. Allow them to decide if they feel comfortable calling you Mom and Dad or by your first names. Ask them how to pronounce their name correctly and if you are using the name they prefer. Avoid giving them a nickname unless you discuss it with them.

- 6. Pets** – Your student may not understand how much your pet is a part of your family and the liberties they have in your home. Discuss it with them in detail when you fill out the host family communication workbook.

7. Religion and Politics

It is important for you to discuss with your student(s) how your religious practices (if any) affect your daily life. Please know that students are informed in orientations before the program begins that they are to be respectful of the family's religious practices, even if they do not wish to participate directly.

In addition, please note that it is not appropriate for the host family to present religious materials (e.g., Bibles, theological tracts) to students for them to take home. If a student has a religious interest, it is up to them to follow up with this in their home country. In the same vein, host families should not present students with political materials.

We welcome open discussions of religious and political views between the student and the host family; this is part of the cross-cultural experience. The open discussion and exchange of views may not include any form of proselytizing or directly advocating for a particular religious or political cause.

8. Personal Hygiene

In some countries it is customary to shower two to three times a day. In others, two to three times a week. Discuss what is customary in your family. Encourage use of deodorants if necessary. Discuss with your student when is a good time for them to use the shower and how long should their shower or bathroom use be in detail when you fill out the host family communication workbook.

9. Communication Helps

- Language Fatigue – Speaking English continuously can be nerve wracking & exhausting for your student. Be creative with the way you communicate if necessary. Draw pictures, play “charades”, post signs around the house.
- Speak slowly and distinctly...avoid contractions like “doncha – don’t you”, “do you wanna – do you want to”, “yep – yes”, “nope – no”.

- Don't correct every mistake they make. When you do correct, do so kindly. Don't laugh at them. Only correct those that will get your student in trouble or laughed at.
- Be prepared to explain that the use of foul language is not acceptable...or that some words are inappropriate. They may just be repeating what they have heard in casual teenage conversation. Or in their country, it may not be as offensive as it is here.
- Encourage communication! Don't accept simple "yes" or "no" answers. Ask questions that require more of an explanation.

Let them know it is OK to make mistakes with you. You are here to help them. They don't have to speak the language perfectly to be understood.

TOPICS FOR LATER DISCUSSION

1. Mealtime

Don't expect your student to like everything that you prepare, and don't take it personally if they do not like a particular dish. (Do you like snails, octopus, guinea pig etc.?) Encourage family members to go first when food is passed around the table so your student can follow their example of appropriate portions and how foods are eaten.

2. Safety Concerns -Discuss the following issues with your student:

- The importance of locking doors
- How and when to answer the door
- The dangers of accepting rides from strangers
- Places to avoid
- How to call the police, fire department, or ambulance in an emergency

3. Cell Phone Use/ Social Media

- Please explain to your student when it is appropriate to use their phone and when they should put it away, such as during dinner or family time.
- If your student needs to talk with family or friends at night because of the time difference, please remind them to speak quietly and use headphones when possible so they do not disturb anyone who is sleeping.

4. Health Insurance and Doctor's Visits

- Students arrive with health insurance coverage.
- ALWAYS contact your coordinator first prior to taking your student to the Doctor (In case of a life-threatening emergency use your best judgment for treatment and contact your coordinator immediately once the student is stable).
- Health care is handled quite differently in many countries and students do not understand that there is no free health care in the US. They may request to see a doctor for very minor issues that can be treated with medication they brought or over the counter medicine.
- Doctor visit co-payments are due at the time of service; paid by student
- It would be helpful if you remind your student to bring their Health Care coverage information and sufficient money or a credit card to pay for services.
- Ensure that your information is not disclosed as to not make you the principal financial responsible party. It is OK for the student to give your address as their residence while in the US. It is best to use our National office address: 2601 Ocean Park Blvd #322 Santa Monica, CA 92307

Points to ponder when considering household rules

• **CHORES** – Be specific about your expectations. Don't say "Please go clean your room". Do show them what you want them to do, i.e.: picking up clutter, dusting the furniture, vacuuming the floor. Don't say "if you see something that needs to be taken care of, please just do it". Do say "we would like you to clear the table and put the dishes in the dishwasher every evening; we would like you to help fold the laundry; on Friday mornings we would like you to take the trash cans to the curb before you go to school."

• **BATHROOM ISSUES**

1. Where may your student keep their toilet articles?
2. Are there any special rules for bathroom care, such as wiping down shower walls or the bathtub? Should the shower curtain be open or closed when they are done taking a shower? Explain why there are two shower curtains. Is the bathroom door to be left open or closed when it is not in use? Should they be sure the door is locked while in use for privacy?
3. What should girls do with used feminine products? Be sure they clearly understand what shouldn't be flushed.

Please mention any of these or that apply in your household when your completing the host family communication workbook.

4. Don't ever lend money to your student and don't borrow money from them.

SETTING REALISTIC GOALS

Ones that work

- Lifestyle sharing
- Learning about cultures (yours and others)
- Developing a friendship with a person from another culture
- Wanting to expose your children to cultural diversity

Ones that don't

- Learning to speak a foreign language
- A ready-made friend for your son/daughter
- A live-in babysitter