

# Pre-Arrival Orientation for Host Families



Association for Teen-Age  
Diplomats

Dear Overseas Liaison.

Before the arrival of the American Exchange Students in your country, it is important that you orient the Host Families about what to expect as parents of a new son or daughter from the United States. Below is a list of topics that you should discuss with the host parents. This discussion should be held a few weeks before the arrival of the American Exchange Students.

## **Introduction:**

Introduce yourself. Explain your role in the exchange program and your role with the host family and exchange student. Provide the family with information on how to contact you and an alternate contact person. Encourage the Host Family to communicate with you on a regular basis.

## **Pre-Arrival:**

The family should exchange letters and photos with the student and his or her parents. Include information about family activities and important values.

Collect materials that will be useful to your student: school handbook, local maps, bus schedule, town and city informational brochures.

Discuss with the family how things will be different with one more person in the family.

## **Coming Home:**

Your student will be exhausted! Show your student their room and the bathroom. Show them how to use the toilet and shower, and where to find the towels. Briefly show them around the rest of the house. Have them call their natural parents to let them know that they arrived safely. Offer them something to eat, but understand they may not want to eat. Remember that it will take several days for your student to adjust to this new time and new style of food.

Go to work the next day. This will give them a chance to sleep in without feeling like they have to get up to be with the family. Tell them to look through the house to get to know where everything is. If the student should not go into a specific room such as the parents' bedroom, let them know that.

## **The Next Few Days:**

The next few days should be spent getting to know each other. Show them around the house in more detail and give them a key. Explain the security system if you have one.

Talk slowly and use simple words. Your student will struggle with the language for several weeks. They will feel more comfortable if you make an effort to help them understand you, rather than their having to frequently ask you to repeat what you say.

Determine what the student will call you, and what name the student likes to be called. Find out if your student is on any medication, or has any food dislikes or allergies.

Look over your student's passport and visa. Check the dates. Make a copy and put it in a safe place. Make sure you know where your student keeps these documents. Check if the visa stamp says "Multiple Entry." If it does not, a special visa will be required if the student leaves the country.

Help your student learn about the community, transportation, and activities. Take him or her with you when you go to the post office, bank, library, shopping, etc.

### **Family Rules:**

Discuss your family rules. Consider the following:

1. Are they expected to help around the house? It is recommended that your new son or daughter have at least one responsibility around the house - wash the dishes, set the table, etc. In this way the exchange student will feel a responsible member of the family.
2. Do they need to ask permission before they go somewhere, or is it sufficient if they leave you a note? Does your student need to consult with the family before planning an activity or event?
3. When are family meal times and what are the expectations? Can the student fix a snack or have something to drink at any time?
4. What are the rules for use of the telephone, computer, stereo, TV, etc?
5. Who will do the laundry?
6. Are there any rules for the bathroom or bedrooms like keeping the doors closed, knocking before entering, or keeping one's room clean?
7. What family activities will your student be expected to participate in, such as attending religious services, family gatherings, or regular family activities?
8. Are there any other rules like not wearing shoes in the house, inviting friends over, turning off lights, or locking doors?
9. Are there any other family rules or expectations?

Accept your student as your own. Expect the student to observe the same rules, responsibilities, and discipline as your own children. Sibling rivalry can occur, so don't make your student the center of attention. Don't be afraid to change the rules if needed. Above all, communicate with your student. Remember that your children are used to everyday life at your house, but your student needs to learn how you live.

The Host Parents are expected to provide a bed, meals (including school lunch if not provided by the school) and study area for the student, and to pay for family activities. The student is expected to pay for toiletries, telephone charges, postage, clothes, and cost of social activities, but the host parents may help with these costs if they wish.

### **School (Year and Semester Exchange Students):**

Make arrangements to enroll your student in classes. Enter them into a full course of study that will be challenging based on their previous academics. Find out if your student is trying to receive school credit, as this may determine the classes they should take.

Have someone show your student around the school so they are not lost the first day. Visit the classrooms, library, gym and cafeteria. Try to meet some of the faculty or athletic coaches. Assure your student knows the proper way to address the teachers. Explain the bus system to your student. Encourage your student to become involved in other school or community activities. The more activities the student is involved with, the more successful the experience will be.

### Money:

Help your student open a bank account if appropriate. Help your student plan a budget and plan ahead for holidays, school trips, etc. Help him or her understand about the cost of items and what is inexpensive versus expensive in your country. If you feel the amount of money your student is spending is too much, do not hesitate to talk to them about their spending habits.

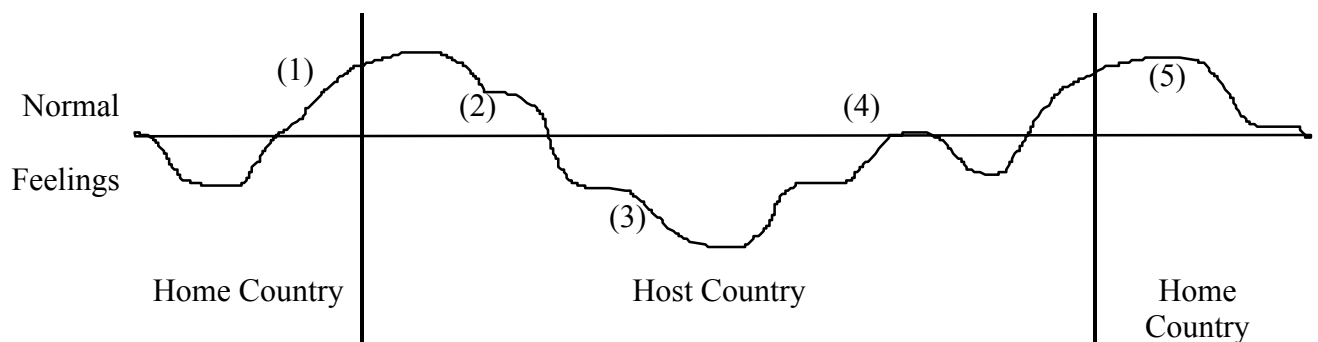
### Communication With Home Country:

Communication by your student with his/her family and friends in the home country should be limited. This includes telephone calls, emails and instant messaging. This is very important to help your student more easily adjust to your culture and your family.

### Culture:

It is important to keep an open mind when dealing with your exchange student. Do not judge or place value judgment on their behaviors or beliefs. Try to understand them, and help them to adjust to "appropriate" behavior in your country.

The student may go through a phase called "culture shock." The following is a typical adjustment curve for exchange students:



1. The student is excited departing from the US and arriving in the host country.
2. As the student becomes more accustomed to his/her new life, emotions become more normal.
3. Students may experience depression at some point, after life has become routine, if they are not adjusting well to their new family or culture, or often around holidays. This is when students begin to think a lot about "home" and old friends.
4. Student has adapted and now feels fully "at home" in the host country, going through the normal small ups and downs of daily life.
5. During the end of the stay there is a lot of excitement with preparing to leave and the anticipation of returning home to see one's family and friends again.

In phase 3 the student's emotions are referred to as "culture shock." Culture shock is a very real physical and emotional reaction to suddenly finding yourself in a culture completely different from your own. It is a time when the student is overloaded with the new things he or she must know and do in the new culture. It is a time when the lack of a familiar support system, such as the natural family and friends, can cause feelings of loneliness and isolation. The following are some signs of culture shock:

1. Getting annoyed at host family rules, expectations, and behaviors.
2. Doesn't communicate, isolates them self in their room, lack self confidence.

3. Over reaction to situations.
4. A lot of time spent thinking about natural family and friends, homesickness.
5. Comparing things to those in home country, thinking everything is better at "home".
6. Physical problems: stomach aches, headaches, nervousness, tension, lack of energy.

When students begin to suffer from culture shock, it is very important that they quickly understand their emotions and how to respond to them. If not, the reaction is likely to be anger and a lack of communication. There is a need for students and host families to talk and share their feelings during these times. The following are some things the host family can encourage their student to do:

1. Go out, get involved, do things, don't stay in your room or sleep late.
2. Don't spend hours writing letters or emails home.
3. Accept feelings as being normal, and work to overcome them.
3. Join a club or activity.
4. Talk to your Host Family and Program Liaison.
5. Take one day at a time. Think things out.
5. Set small goals that you can accomplish by yourself as: how to travel on your own, how to say a new phrase, identify one new person whom you are going to say "Hi" to.
6. Ask your family for help to accomplish goals; the whole family can benefit by working out of the depression of culture shock.

It is important to know, understand, and deal with culture shock quickly. Don't be afraid to consult your Program Liaison for help.

Close with encouragement and a warm welcome of the host families.