

## NOVEMBER SUPPORT TIPS

Most of your students and host families are already into their third month of exchange and the adjustment cycle continues to change with the seasons. As you help your students prepare for the holidays, encourage them to talk about and share the holiday traditions of their natural family and country. Remind students they are here to “exchange” their culture with ours!

November is the month of giving thanks. YFU wants to take a moment and say **Thank you for the work you do!** YFU could not exist without Local Coordinators like yourself!

### SUPPORT TIPS

#### HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Thanksgiving is a great opportunity for students to show gratitude and appreciation! Encourage students to learn about Thanksgiving traditions. Provide low cost, simple ideas for ways to show “thankfulness” for their host family, school, and community. A thank you note goes a long way! This will be a new holiday for most of your students; be prepared to explain it to them.

#### CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

For students and host families, the honeymoon has ended and they are experiencing the day to day reality of life in the US. Exchange students experience many highs and lows during the year and nearly all students experience some stronger emotions around the holiday season. Talk about holiday plans and concerns with students and remind them that some homesickness is normal. Prepare host families that their student(s) may be more homesick and may have more contact with their natural families during the holidays.

#### SCHEDULE / TRAVELING FOR THE HOLIDAYS

November and December will be busy with holiday activities. Consider setting contact dates with your student and host family in advance. Make your contacts early in the month, to avoid reminders and give yourself time to make multiple attempts. Also, scheduling the following months’ contact while you are already on the phone with them will help prevent the stress of unanswered phone calls.

Many host families travel with their students during the holiday season. Be prepared to answer questions about YFU’s Permission to Travel Policy and remind host families to submit their travel requests via their online host family account. LCs often travel during the holidays as well. If you plan to be traveling / unavailable during the holidays, please let your students and families know, and ask that they contact their Community Manager if they need assistance / have questions while you are gone.

#### MONTHLY CONTACT (Try, try again!)

Sometimes, reaching students and host families to complete monthly contacts can be difficult. If you are unable to reach your student for your monthly contact requirement, as the saying goes: try, try again! If you have made multiple failed attempts to reach your student and/or host family, let your Community Manager (CM) know. Keep in mind that monthly contact is required by the Department of State; even if everything is going well, LCs must still document monthly contact with both the student and host family.

#### INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK

International Education Week (IEW) occurs during the month of November. IEW is an opportunity to celebrate the benefits of international education and exchange worldwide! Many students choose to do a presentation on their home country / culture during International Education Week (scholarship students are required to). This is also an excellent time to promote YFU’s study abroad programs for American students.

#### PROMOTING STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

YFU is focused on growing our Study Abroad program, and we need your help! Some of the strongest ambassadors of YFU’s programs are our international students. LCs can help by encouraging their students to talk to American friends and give a presentation in their class

about how their American peers can also become an exchange student. YFU finds that foreign language teachers and social studies classes are typically very open to this. If you become aware of an American student interested in studying abroad, please refer them to these helpful webpages: <https://www.yfuusa.org/study/scholarships> (scholarships) and <https://www.yfuusa.org/study/countries> (country information page).

## LEARNING BY BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The 3<sup>rd</sup> month of exchange is a time when students' relationships begin to deepen; they stop being a "guest" and become part of the family. It is through these relationships that students learn about their new culture. Students and host families begin to realize that the cultural adjustment they are both going through is not something that needs to be fixed, but rather an essential part of the exchange experience. They are able to relax and enjoy their growing friendships, helping the student to adapt and avoid feelings of isolation.

*Three areas of cultural adjustment exchange students commonly experience include:*

**The loss of familiar people, routines & surroundings.** By the 3<sup>rd</sup> month, most feelings of loss have lessened because students have developed new relationships and routines and are becoming more comfortable with their surroundings.

**The sense of inadequacy due to an inability to communicate.** Students are likely to fumble in English which may make them feel silly or embarrassed. This can be unnerving, but it's important to be able to laugh at one's mistakes and to learn from them.

**Dealing with differences in values, attitudes, and beliefs.** Keeping an open mind about host country behaviors and beliefs and understanding them within a cultural context helps students learn and grow.

Most of these stages repeat throughout the year. Once a student has become comfortable in the culture, new challenges arise, putting them through the stages all over again. Keep these adjustments in mind as you help guide students and host families through their experience!

## BELO TRIPS

YFU students have the option to participate in trips to see more of the US while they are on program; these trips are organized by BELO. BELO offers several trips throughout the exchange year. Students and their natural parents are responsible for the cost of these trips. Students should check with their host family and school before signing up for a BELO trip. A YFU permission to travel form is not required for these trips; students should communicate directly with BELO re: trip information and sign up.

If you do not have a copy of the BELO trip brochure, calendar, & trip information, please ask your Community Manager for these materials!

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

### FOR STUDENTS

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#### Do you know what your Thanksgiving plans are?

Students may be feeling anxious about the holidays, and knowledge is power. The more they know about their host family's (and thus their own) plans for the holidays, the easier and more fun this season will be for them. Also, make sure students know that visits by their natural families should not occur until later in the program year. These visits interrupt the adjustment process and make it more difficult for the student; potentially creating an awkward situation between the student and both families.

#### Are there any holiday traditions you usually do at home that you will share with your host family?

Sharing traditions from home can aid in reducing homesickness and helps the host family feel as if the student is really engaging with their family during the holidays. Students can share songs, recipes, dances, movies, prayers, etc. – whatever they usually do at home with their natural family is a wonderful thing to share with their host family!

#### How is school, and your classes? How were your mid-term grades?

It's important that students feel supported by their host family and LC when they are struggling in school. Remind students that YFU wants them to try their best in school and to maintain at least a C average. Ask your student what YFU can do to help them

maintain this level of achievement. Is the host family aware of the struggles? Has the student spoken to a teacher or a counselor at school? Can you help the student speak to an appropriate staff person at school?

### **Have there been any major changes in your host home since you moved in? Has anyone moved in or out?**

It is not always evident to YFU when a hosting situation has changed. However, it is important that we stay informed of any significant household changes for the safety and well-being of our students. Has anyone in the family changed jobs, lost jobs, changed schedules, moved in or out, etc.?

### **Do you feel like your English has improved?**

It is helpful to discuss your student's mastery of the English language every month, until or unless you feel they do not need to have this conversation any longer. It shows the student that you want to help and want to make sure they are understanding what is happening around them. If your student needs tips for English acquisition, see the October Monthly Support Tips. Students can also use free language learning apps such as Duolingo and Babbel. If your student is still really struggling, perhaps the school can recommend an English tutor.

Reassure students that it takes time to learn a new language and the best way for them to really develop their English is to be active with other English-speaking people and speak English as much as possible!

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## **FOR FAMILIES**

### **What are your holiday plans?**

It can be helpful during this conversation to be familiar with YFU's stance regarding holiday plans and expenses. The holidays can be an emotional time for students who are living away from home. Host families should talk with their students early on about what the family's holiday plans are. If a family's holiday plans include travel, they should consider who will pay for airline tickets and other expenses. Students' budgets cannot always afford this, but students should not be left behind. Refer to the Permission to Travel Policy for details re: what type of travel requires YFU approval and additional documentation.

### **How frequently do you have conversations with your student about their adjustment?**

When a host family acknowledges they understand that the student is continually going through challenges – both large and small– it reassures the student that their host family has a sense of the numerous adjustments the student is making every day. This can be comforting. It is helpful for host families to talk with students about the student's coping skills and help the student list all of the supports they can utilize (host family members, LC, CM, SSM, school counselor, teachers, American friends, etc.).

### **Has your student shown signs of homesickness?**

LCs should remind host families that the holidays are a prime time for homesickness. Often exchange students get swept up in their host family's traditions and begin missing their traditions from home. Host families can help their students through the "holiday blues" by encouraging them to share the holiday traditions of their country. Remind your host families that if their student is feeling extra homesick, it is not reflective of the student's feelings towards the host family; this is a natural feeling during this time of the year and it will pass.

### **Do you know how your student is doing at school?**

With mid-term grades out, LCs should remind host families that YFU is more concerned with the full exchange experience than the student having a straight A report card. A student who is engaged with their host family and community and accomplishing a "C" average (or better) in their classes is considered a successful student. Academically speaking, YFU is more concerned with a student's effort than the student's grades. November is a wonderful time for a thank you note to the school – from the student, host family, and /or LC!