

How Do You Do Things in Your Home?



YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING
Intercultural Exchange Programs

The following questions will help you consider some of your family's most basic habits. Each family is different from every other, and that is particularly true when you compare your family to one from another country. The more you can communicate your habits to your new family member, the smoother your adjustment period will be. Take some time the first week or two after your students' arrival to read through the questions below to identify some of your family's patterns and take the natural opportunities you will have with your student to share them.

Food

- When does your family eat meals? Is everyone expected to be there? Do you eat breakfast and lunch on your own or with the family?
- Is snacking allowed? What types of food can you snack on (candy, fruit, leftovers, etc.)?
- Can you eat in the living room, bedroom, etc.?
- Is it important that your exchange student uses American table manners?
- Is it important that everyone eat basically the same thing (same menu) at the table?
- What appliances do you use in your home? Your student may not be familiar with American appliances.
- What's for lunch on a school day? Host families will provide 3 meals a day. Clearly define what the family will pay for or at school and/or if food will be available at home for your student to bring lunch.

Dishes

- Who does the dishes, (or loads and unloads the dishwasher)?
- Are dirty dishes washed immediately, or is it acceptable to leave them in the sink or on the counter until a later time?
- What soap is used for dishes, in the dishwasher, etc.? You may need to explain that only dishwasher soap is used in the dishwasher.

Telephone

- Are mobile devices allowed at the dinner table?
- Are there limits on the duration of telephone calls?
- How often can your student make phone calls?
- Does your student need a cell phone?
- Does your student need to text you to tell you what time he or she will be home?

Pets

- Is your dog, cat, or other pet allowed inside or outside?

- Do you allow your pet(s) on the furniture or bed?
- Who feeds and cares for your pet(s)?
- Is your pet friendly towards other people?
- May your pet eat the table scraps? May they eat from regular dinner plates?

TV, Music, Social Media etc.

- What is the tolerated noise level?
- Who decides which show or movie to watch?
- Is there a specific time you want the TV or music turned off?
- Is the TV only allowed on weekends or after homework is completed?
- Can everyone use the Netflix/Hulu account?
- What are your rules about computer/internet use?
- If using your family computer - can computer programs be added/deleted?
- May a student's friends use the family computer?
- If your student needs to print a lot of papers, should he or she pay for the printer supplies?
- Are there printer supplies (paper, ink, etc.)?
- If your student has a laptop, where should it be used and left when not in use?
- Does your family have limits on the use of social media?
- Is there an electronic curfew? (A time for ALL electronics to be charging in a public room for the night)

Bathroom

- Who uses which one(s)?
- What is the most convenient time to use the bathroom for showering/bathing and how much time is allowed?
- How long is too long in the bathroom?
- Do you expect everyone to shower everyday?
- Should the toilet seat and cover be up or down?
- Where should wet towels be put? How often are they washed?

- Should the door to the bathroom be open or closed when not in use?
- Exchange Students should buy their own personal hygiene products, such as deodorant, etc.

Laundry

- Where should dirty laundry be left? In a hamper, bathroom, bedroom floor, etc.?
- Does everyone do their own laundry, or does one person take responsibility?
- How often are sheets changed and who is responsible for changing them?

Bedroom

- Should the door be left closed or open?
- Do you knock before entering bedrooms or just open the door?
- Does the bed have to be made every day, never, or just on special occasions?
- Is it acceptable for your student to pile his or her clothes on the bed, chair, or floor? Should clothes be put away at all times?
- Who is responsible for cleaning the bedroom(s)?
- Is your student allowed to hang things on the wall with tacks, tape, or other materials?
- If your student is sharing a bedroom, how can each individual adapt to each other smoothly?
- What are the concerns about lights, keeping windows open or closed, etc.? When do you get up and go to bed? How will everyone study and where?
- What are the rules surrounding friends (of both sexes) in the bedroom?

Odds and Ends

- Does your student need permission or need to tell you where he or she is going before leaving the house?
- Whose is the living room and for what purpose?
- Can you put your feet on the furniture?
- Are shoes to be worn in the house or taken off?
- Are doors and windows to be kept shut, open, locked, or unlocked?
- Do you have a curfew? What are the "house" rules? What are the consequences of breaking them?
- Are there assigned household chores, weekly, daily, rotating, etc.?

- Does the family attend a place of worship together? Every week or only on certain occasions? Should your student wear his or her best clothes to the place of worship?
- Are there designated "family times" daily or weekly? Explain when family members are encouraged to be together in common areas to play games, watch TV, etc.
- Is there a central family calendar?
- When are the family birthdays? What is your family's culture around celebrating and gift giving?
- What should your student call you - Mom, Dad or by first name?
- Who helps with meal preparation and cleanup (clearing the table, washing dishes, etc.)?
- What transportation is available - school bus, public bus, bicycle? Is it safe to walk around the area alone?
- How warm/cool do you keep your home?
- What is the overall tone of the household? Is it loud or quiet?
- What are the unwritten family rules? Think of iceberg and those rules below the water line.