



YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING
Intercultural Exchange Programs

FEBRUARY SUPPORT TIPS

February may be a short month but it is full of national and cultural holidays - such as Black History Month, Valentine's Day and President's Day. We hope these support tips provide you with information to have comfortable and meaningful conversations during your monthly meeting with students and families. As always, thank you for the work you do, YFU could not exist without Local Coordinators like you!

SUPPORT TIPS

CONTACT FORMER HOST FAMILIES

February is an excellent time to connect with your Community Manager regarding which former host families should be contacted and which should not. Many families will be interested in hosting again, even if their current or previous student did not work out. It is important to discuss with families what worked, and what didn't; and what the family is looking for in their next hosting experience.

If a host family does not want to commit to the whole year, no problem! Many families commit to the first 3 months or the first semester. Some families will want to take a year off. Some families should not be contacted (your Community Manager and Support Services Manager can provide this info). Many families will be ready to go again, and will be excited to discuss students coming in the fall! YFU is always in need of emergency host families as well; if a former family wants to help but does not want to commit, ask if they are willing to be a short term emergency family.

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY!

In the US, Valentine's Day is not only reserved for couples and romantic relationships. Local Coordinators should let their students know that many people in the US send cards to friends and family. A heartfelt card is an excellent way for students to express their gratitude to their host family and their friends! If students wish to hand out several Valentine's cards, it may be helpful to share with them that reasonably priced boxes of cards are available at the local grocery store.

WINTER BLUES & CABIN FEVER

With the weather still cold and school day cancellations, this is the time of year for "cabin fever." Students can experience boredom and depression. Additionally, students and families who have been in close proximity

for long periods of time tend to find each other annoying and may complain or say unkind things. Local Coordinators can help by encouraging students to join a winter sport or club, take the student out of the house for a visit, and help the student come up with a hobby they can do indoors (card games, painting, baking, reading, journaling, playing an instrument, etc.). It is also helpful to remind students and host family members to focus on the things they like about each other and find things they enjoy doing together.

IN PERSON CONTACT BY LOCAL COORDINATOR

If you did not conduct your in-person visit with your student and host family in January, it must be conducted in February. As a reminder, LCs are required to conduct two in-person visits per exchange year (this is a Department of State requirement). This counts as your required monthly contact, so be sure to talk with your student and host family separately. Additionally, don't forget to indicate that the visit took place in person on your monthly contact report.

SPRING BREAK TRAVEL

Many students and families will want to travel for Spring Break. Local Coordinators should remind students and families to submit their travel request via the online permission to travel form, if required. You may consult the Permission to Travel Policy if you are not sure what is required for which type of travel.

LCs should remind students and families that approval for international travel takes longer and requires a signature on the student's DS-2019 document. Generally, a request for international travel should be submitted 4 weeks prior to the trip. In general, YFU does not approve visits from natural families during March; YFU requests that natural families visit the student at the end of their exchange.

END OF THE YEAR / RETURN TRAVEL

Students and host families typically begin to receive communication from YFU Travel re: their student's summer return flight in January. If your student or family has a question about the information they have received, please check with your Community Manager or Support Services Manager. Most students return in mid to late June; it is helpful to keep this in mind as sometimes, host families are surprised their student is not scheduled to return home as soon as school is out.

Some students are able to change their return flight by submitting a "CDR," or Change of Departure Request. Not all students are allowed to change their flight, however. YFU Travel typically sends information re: the CDR process to students and families in late January or early February.

REPORTING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

YFU is required to report some situations to the Department of State - via an Incident Report - within 24 hours of the incident. Examples include domestic violence, law enforcement or CPS involvement, grooming behavior and/or sexual abuse, significant mental health concerns, student admitted to the hospital, violence in the host school, bullying or hate crimes, and/or any incident that may become a news story. When in doubt, ask your Support Services Manager.

If you become aware of a reportable incident outside of business hours, please call YFU's emergency support line at: **1-800-424-3691** for the on-call support worker.

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOL

ATTENDANCE

If you become aware that your student has missed several days of school, please alert your Community Manager and Support Services Manager immediately. Regular school attendance is a requirement of the J-1 visa. Some schools have a limited number of absences an exchange student is permitted to have. It is very important that YFU follow up on the reason for the absences and implement a solution that works for everyone.

GRADES

You will likely be asked what YFU's policy regarding student grades is. YFU requires that students maintain at least a "C" average in each of their classes. Regarding YFU's follow up: a student who is trying their hardest but still making a "D" will not immediately receive disciplinary action; however, a student who is skipping class, using their phone in class, not completing classwork or turning in homework, etc. will receive disciplinary action in the form of a Warning Letter.

CLASSES

YFU recommends that students take one English class and one US History class; however, these classes are not *required*. YFU prefers for students to be enrolled in classes the student can be successful in. Some students need to be enrolled in ESL classes while some students have excellent English. Local Coordinators should be aware of what classes their student is enrolled in and can assist the student with a schedule change, if necessary. For instance, a Japanese student who has mediocre English should not be enrolled in AP Economics.

*The above does not apply to students on the **CBYX, FLEX, or YES** scholarship. These students are *required* to take an English class and an American History or American Government class.

Local Coordinators should stay in touch with the school and collect information re: their student's behavior, absences, grades, and extra-curricular activities throughout the year. This shows the school that YFU values the relationship with the school and that YFU will work to address any issues that may come up.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

FOR STUDENTS

What goals did you set at your Mid-Year Orientation? How do you plan to achieve these goals?

At Mid-Year Orientations, students discuss the exchange so far and set goals for the remaining months. Take some time to discuss goals and plans with your students; as executing these plans can be key to having a successful completion of their exchange. For example, encourage students to try a new activity or sport. It is not uncommon to “slump” during the winter doldrums, and a new activity can be a wonderful antidote for the winter blues.

Did you receive information about your return travel plans? Have you discussed your travel dates and plans with your host family and natural family?

It may seem early, but it is important to go over what the students and families have received from YFU Travel. They may have questions and/or the student may want to change their return flight, if possible. If you do not know how to answer their question(s), write them down and ask your Community Manager!

How are you doing in school? What grades do you expect? What classes are you taking this term? How many hours are you spending on homework?

YFU recommends that Local Coordinators stay informed about their student’s progress in school; academically and socially. It is helpful to know what the school is seeing, and if the student has any concerns. If your student is spending several hours every day on homework, their schedule may need to be tweaked. If your student reports any bullying or any unsafe conditions at their school, please notify your Support Services Manager immediately. If your student is doing well, please pass that information along to your local YFU staff!

Do you have any plans for Spring Break? Are you signed up for any BELO trips?

Local Coordinators should be ready to answer questions about student travel; as many students and host families travel during Spring Break. Please refer to the Permission to Travel Policy if you need a refresher. It is helpful to know where and when your student is traveling so that you can schedule your monthly contacts around their trip.

BELO is a travel agency YFU partners with to offer students additional options to see parts of the US (New York, Hawaii, San Francisco, etc.). Students and their natural parents are responsible for the cost of BELO trips and the trip must not interfere with host family plans. YFU does not need a Permission to Travel request for BELO trips; these trips do not require YFU approval via the Permission to Travel system. BELO informs YFU of which students are signed up for their trips and all information / communication goes through BELO. In general, students who are on Probation are not permitted to attend BELO trips.

FOR HOST FAMILIES

Did you receive information about your student’s return travel date yet? Have you discussed it with your student?

Host families and students should have received an email from YFU Travel by February, providing their student’s return date and information about submitting a Change of Departure Request. Please note that not all students can change their return date. Additionally, please note that YFU Travel does not arrange travel for *all* students; grant student (FLEX, YES, and CBYX) travel is arranged by American Councils and some YFU partner offices arrange their own travel.

Please keep in mind that most students return in mid to late June. If the host family reports they cannot host until the student's departure date, YFU will need to secure another placement for the student when the host family needs to be done hosting. Please let your Community Manager know if this is the case with any of your students / families.

How is your student doing in school? Is your student taking different classes this semester / trimester?

Local Coordinators should ensure that host families are aware of their student's academic progress. If the host family has access to the student's grades online, the grades should be shared with the LC periodically. If the host family only receives report cards, that is ok too; just ask your host families for copies of the report cards.

Keep in mind that a requirement of hosting is to provide the student with a quiet place to study and complete homework. It is ok to ask to see where the student is completing their homework, and if it seems chaotic or loud, recommend that the family identifies a more private / quiet place for the student. If two students are sharing a desk in the bedroom, ask if they have worked out a schedule!

Do you have Spring Break travel plans? If so, have you reviewed the Permission to Travel Policy and submitted a request (if one is required)?

Local Coordinators should be ready to answer host family questions about travel as many host families plan to take their student on a trip during Spring Break. YFU recommends having a copy of the Permission to Travel Policy on hand for the LC and host family to refer to. Host families can submit their permission to travel request online via their host family account.

If the host parents plan to travel without their student, that is ok; YFU will just need to identify a temporary, vetted placement for the student while the host family is away. If you have questions about this process, please ask your Community Manager.

Do you plan to host again with YFU next year?

February is an appropriate time for LCs to begin discussing whether or not their families plan to host during the upcoming school year. If you are in the middle of working through a support case, it may not be the best time to discuss it – use your best judgement re: the timing of this conversation.

When you are ready to discuss it with your families, it may be helpful to have profiles ready to share with them. If the family does not want to commit to an entire year, that is ok; many families host for the first three months or the first semester. Additionally, YFU always needs vetted emergency families; this is an excellent option for a family that wants a break for most of the year but is willing to help out temporarily, in an emergency.

If you have any questions about Monthly Contacts, please contact your Community Manager!