



## Common Cultural Traits in YES Program Countries

The cultural traits below are common in some YES countries. Use this resource as a guide to understand the cultural context for your student's behavior. Remember not all traits apply to all YES students.

Discuss with your student to help your family and student with adjustments.



## Home Life & Family Interactions

In some YES cultures, the student...	Because at home...
Has difficulty making decisions	Teens are used to being cared for by parents and/or elders, who are figures of authority. Decisions are made as a family, not by the teen alone. As a result, teens are less mature and independent. ✓ <b><i>Be prepared to assist the student with decision-making.</i></b>
Makes decisions based on family concerns	Family honor is an important concept and expectation for members of collectivist cultures. ✓ <b><i>Encourage the student to explore his/her interests while in the US.</i></b>
Keeps the bedroom door closed	A closed bedroom door indicates a good child that is studying, or it might be necessary to reduce mosquitos. ✓ <b><i>Explain the practice in your household, and be patient as the student adapts.</i></b>
Doesn't do chores	Housekeepers and chauffeurs are common as the majority of students are from the upper middle class (Saudi Arabia only). The mother is often responsible for household management and teens do not do chores. ✓ <b><i>Clearly articulate US household responsibilities and expectations to the student.</i></b>
Doesn't bring friends to the house	Friends usually gather outside of the home in groups. Some students may be accustomed to social interaction with peers only at school or in school-related activities (India). ✓ <b><i>Explain family norms for inviting guests and encourage the student to pursue one-on-one interactions. Encourage him/her to find a healthy balance between school, extra-curricular activities, and a social life.</i></b>



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Behaves formally and/or is quiet around adults	Teenagers are not accustomed to informal interaction with adults and are taught deference and no eye contact is appropriate for all adults. ✓ <b><i>Explain US cultural norms on adult-teenager interactions to the student.</i></b>
Seems lonely	Students might be used to little to no privacy or personal space. Extended families in one household are common. ✓ <b><i>In the US, students can feel they spend too much time alone.</i></b>
Doesn't socialize at home	Socializing happens on the weekend, while watching TV, or when sitting in traffic, not during the weekday routine at home after a long day at work or when the focus is on schoolwork. ✓ <b><i>Explain to your student how your family fits in time to talk at home.</i></b>
Doesn't respond to discipline	Use of physical discipline is common, so US discipline may seem not of consequence. ✓ <b><i>Explain consequences to the student or decide together on appropriate consequence.</i></b>
Uses family members' personal items	Sharing among family members, especially siblings, is common. ✓ <b><i>Explain your family's norms for sharing to the student.</i></b>
Acts uncomfortable around same-sex couples	Same-sex parent families are illegal. Two-parent family households are predominant and there are few single parent households. ✓ <b><i>Explain that respect for an individual's choices permits different lifestyles in the US.</i></b>



## Food and Meals

In some YES cultures, the student...	Because at home...
Remains quiet during meals	Socializing during meals is considered impolite and a choking hazard. ✓ <b><i>Be patient as the student adapts to conversation over meals.</i></b>
Doesn't eat leftovers	Leftovers are not considered a quality meal so the student is not used to considering it otherwise. ✓ <b><i>Explain how your family uses leftovers to create meals and/or snacks.</i></b>



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Doesn't help with meal preparation	The mother typically handles most or all family cooking. Male students may be unfamiliar with cooking. ✓ <b>Encourage your student to make a dish from his country to share with the family.</b>
Doesn't snack	Mealtimes are distinct with no snacks in between. ✓ <b>Inform student of your family's rules regarding snacks.</b>



## Social Interactions

In some YES cultures, the student...	Because at home...
Respects older adults	Age commands respect. Students are helpful to older relatives and give their needs precedence. Deference to older adults is respectful and does not indicate a perceived "disability." ✓ <b>Suggest your student share with older adults how they are valued and respected in their home country.</b>
Avoids eye contact and speaks quietly	It is considered a sign of politeness and respect for authority figures. Quiet children are considered "good" children, while those who ask lots of questions are seen as troublesome. ✓ <b>Give tips on appropriate ways to interact (eye contact is OK, questions indicate interest) and allow your student time to become comfortable interacting with adults.</b>
Doesn't say "thank you"	Expressing thanks is not expected. The US custom of multiple "thank you's" would be considered annoying in some YES countries. ✓ <b>Demonstrate and instruct the student when and how it is appropriate to express thanks.</b>
Is persistent in the face of a "no"	Rules are enforced with flexibility and persistence may lead to exceptions being made. ✓ <b>Explain to your student that in the US, rules are generally firm and negotiating rules is not a common practice.</b>
Makes excuses	Delivering bad news is avoided.



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	✓ <b>Advise the student that direct communication and honesty is valued in US culture.</b>
Doesn't openly express feelings or shows only positive emotions	Expressing negative emotions is avoided. Body language, rather than direct verbal communication, might be used to convey emotions. ✓ <b>Encourage students to share feelings and ask probing questions to gauge their emotions.</b>
Doesn't use the left hand	The left hand is considered unclean and it is insulting to use it to give an object to someone. ✓ <b>Explain such a distinction is not made in the US and there is even a Left-Handed Day!</b> <a href="http://www.lefthandersday.com/about.html">http://www.lefthandersday.com/about.html</a>
Says "no" to offers of food and assistance	In some countries, offers and invitations are declined the first one or more times. It is expected to make offers multiple (3) times before the recipient will accept. ✓ <b>Ask your student how many times an offer of hospitality or assistance is made before it is accepted in their home country. Explain that applying that in the US may mean he/she will miss opportunities.</b>
Says "yes" to everything	Politeness is strongly valued. ✓ <b>Explain to student that it is ok to say "no" if it is for a good reason.</b>
Uses indirect communication	Parents and children do not speak directly about an issue. ✓ <b>Involve the student in family discussions if there is an issue to address. Advise student that direct communication and honesty is valued in US culture. It may take practice for your student. Try some examples such as "Hhmm, the plants look a little dry..." instead of "You forgot to water the plants."</b>
Normally arrives 15-30 minutes late	Time is more flexible and punctuality is not as important. ✓ <b>Give your student specifics on the acceptable time to arrive depending on the event – whether it is a meeting with the principal or a gathering of friends on Friday evening.</b>
Doesn't smile at strangers in public	It is considered unusual or fake to smile at strangers. ✓ <b>Ask your student if he has noticed a difference in how strangers react to each other in public and explain the norm in your community.</b>
Doesn't interact with the opposite sex in public	Society is segregated and dating is uncommon. Interaction with romantic interests only takes place under supervision at family ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. The student may feel more comfortable interacting with the opposite sex in groups. ✓ <b>Ask your student about her comfort level and be aware that his/her behavior – whether shy or extroverted – might be due to the newness of the situation.</b>





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Seems uncomfortable or overwhelmed by US attire or physical displays of affection	<p>Clothing is more modest. Greetings, particularly between members of the opposite sex, do not include physical contact.</p> <p>✓ <b><i>Be attentive to student's reaction and adjust your behavior accordingly. Once you've gotten to know each other, explain typical US contact (friendly hugs, physical contact); ask about his/her comfort level and and respect his/her preference.</i></b></p>
Enjoys hugging and other physical displays of affection	<p>Friends and family members are very demonstrative. (Unique to Turkey)</p> <p>✓ <b><i>Be aware and appropriately supportive of your student if he/she comes from an affectionate culture.</i></b></p>
Enjoys interacting with children in public places	<p>There is a strong emphasis on community relationships and caretaking is a community affair.</p> <p>✓ <b><i>Explain appropriate ways to acknowledge children and that Americans may be distrustful if a stranger pays too much attention their children.</i></b></p>



## School Life

In some YES cultures, the student...	Because at home...
Has a formal dynamic with his/her teachers	<p>Teachers are treated as respected figures of authority.</p> <p>✓ <b><i>Explain the level of formality in your local school guiding the interactions between teachers and students.</i></b></p>
Seems particularly stressed and/or exhausted during the first weeks of school	<p>He/she might be accustomed to remaining in the same classroom with the same classmates for all subjects. It could be overwhelming to meet new students in each class.</p> <p>✓ <b><i>Recognize your student may need more assistance navigating class changes and downtime after the day due to the extra effort to change classes and get to know so many students.</i></b></p>
Always studies	Academic success is paramount and the primary responsibility of teenagers is to study.



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	✓ <i>Encourage the student to find a healthy balance between school, extra-curricular activities, and a social life.</i>
Frequently skips class	Absences are tolerated. ✓ <i>Inform the student that only illness and special events are excused absences in US schools.</i>
Doesn't complete homework assignments	Homework is rare and not graded. This is to allow time to study for college entrance exams. ✓ <i>Explain US school policy that homework is part of the grade and exchange students are expected to keep up with this requirement.</i>
Does not appropriately cite sources and/or shares his/her work with others	Cultural norms place less emphasis on citing sources and more emphasis on helping others and trusting the insights of those with expertise. ✓ <i>Explain the concept of plagiarism to your student and that it is taken seriously in US schools.</i>
Seems bored by his/her classes	His/her school generally has a higher level of academic instruction. ✓ <i>Encourage the student to take courses not available in his/her home country to avoid boredom.</i>