



YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING
Intercultural Exchange Programs



Future Leaders Exchange Program

Common Cultural Traits in FLEX Program Countries

The cultural traits below are common in some FLEX countries. Use this resource as a guide to understand the cultural context for your student's behavior. Remember, not all traits apply to all FLEX students. Discuss with your student to help your family and student with adjustments.



Home Life & Family Interactions

In some FLEX cultures, the student...	Because at home...
Doesn't help with chores	<p>Guests are honored and should be treated accordingly. Your student might perceive him/herself as your guest. For male students, reluctance to do chores may be a result of traditional gender roles at home, where males are "doted on."</p> <p>✓ Remind your student that he/she is a part of the family, not a guest. Explain that in U.S. families, housework is not "women's work" or "men's work," it is simply work shared by adults and children in the household.</p>
Is overly dependent	<p>Families have close ties. Older family members guide younger members and encourage children to be "children." Even teenagers are not expected to be too independent.</p> <p>✓ Give clear guidelines about when you expect the student to ask for advice or permission, and suggest decisions they should feel free to make on their own. It may also be helpful to talk to students about how you make decisions.</p>
Has difficulty managing money	<p>Money is not easily obtained and allowances are rare. Your student's natural family may expect or pressure the student to bring money home. He/she may want to spend the stipend on big-ticket items, like electronics, because they are less expensive in the U.S. If your student perceives him/herself as a guest, he/she might expect the "host" to pay for most things.</p> <p>✓ Remind your student that the stipend is provided to help him/her learn American culture by spending time with friends and participating in events. Discuss your expectations for expenses the student should cover and offer to help him/her set up a budget.</p>



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Has more relaxed personal hygiene habits	<p>Customs of how one bathes, and how often, vary. Some people think Americans are too concerned about cleanliness and body odor and may consider daily rituals unnecessary.</p> <p>✓ <i>Explain to your student that personal hygiene is an important US value. Discuss expectations for personal hygiene standards (e.g. showering once a day, brushing teeth twice a day) and their role in maintaining good health and wellness.</i></p>
Acts ungrateful or demanding	<p>Students may feel entitled due to a perception that all Americans are wealthy.</p> <p>✓ <i>Explain that most Americans are not wealthy, and those contributing to the student's experience are volunteering time and resources which they worked hard for. Remind the student that demonstrating appreciation is an important US value.</i></p>



Social Interactions

In some FLEX cultures, the student...	Because at home...
Smiles infrequently	<p>Being genuine is an important value. Constant smiling or smiling at strangers is seen as "fake" and not smiling is considered a neutral expression.</p> <p>✓ <i>Remind your student that Americans value friendliness and view smiling as an invitation to talk.</i></p>
Complains or has a pessimistic attitude	<p>There may be a sense of general pessimism in many FLEX countries, where things do not always proceed as promised, planned or expected. Your student could also be seeking sympathy or comfort. Complaining is a culturally acceptable way to communicate these needs and/or share information.</p> <p>✓ <i>Explain to your student that Americans respond better to positive approaches. There are ways to communicate a point without being negative.</i></p>
Acts passively and avoids eye contact	<p>Traditional gender roles encourage passivity in women. This behavior may also be a sign of a child's respect for adults.</p> <p>✓ <i>Give tips on appropriate ways to interact (e.g. eye contact shows that you are interested and attentive) and encourage female students to try new things, especially activities with other girls.</i></p>



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Exaggerates emotions	<p>It is a culturally acceptable way to express caring and concern.</p> <p>✓ <i>Explain to your student that Americans value honest and straightforward communication. Some Americans may view exaggerated emotions as insincere or dramatic. Give tips on appropriate ways to react in different situations.</i></p>
Is persistent in the face of a "no"	<p>A flexible attitude toward rules is prevalent. Complex bureaucracies in some FLEX countries have led to a culture where "no" means "ask someone else" to avoid getting in trouble for saying yes. Asking multiple times or asking different individuals can increase the chances of getting a "yes."</p> <p>✓ <i>Explain that in the US, rules are generally firm and negotiating rules is not a common practice.</i></p>

Resources for this tip sheet:

FLEX Host Family Handbook (2012)

FLEX Student Handbook (2013-2014)

Common Cultural Issues for FLEX Students by American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS