



Handbook for Host Families of Ghanaian Participants



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Foreword

Thank you for volunteering to welcome a young student from Ghana into your home, family, and community! The coming months will present a multitude of learning opportunities for both you and your participant.

Objectives of Handbook

This Handbook for Host Families of Ghanaian Participants is dedicated and directed toward you, the host family. You represent one of the indispensable ingredients required for our international exchange programs to be successful. The information contained here will also be shared with exchange program support volunteers so that they too will better understand the Ghanaian student's world view and will be able to provide culturally sensitive and appropriate support to both the hosted student and the host family.

Awareness of the existence of cultural differences and how to deal with these differences can have a profoundly positive impact on the quality of your relationship with your participant and on your entire family's hosting experience. To this end, this handbook is designed to help you learn about both the Ghanaian **and** U.S. culture by examining a number of cultural topics which are in strong contrast with each other. We hope that you will find these to be especially interesting and informative:

- Traditions and rituals.
- Key differences between the U.S. and Ghanaian school systems.
- Predominant communication styles in the U.S.A. and Ghana.
- The general Ghanaian and U.S. American views on concepts such as time, space and privacy.
- Ghanaian family structure, rules, etc.
- Ghanaian cultural norms regarding personal appearance, religion, etc.

And of course, you are not expected to read through this entire Handbook in one sitting! At first you will probably want to familiarize yourself with its contents, read intensively those areas of special interest and then, during the coming weeks, to continue to refer back to the various topics as situations occur. We hope that you will enjoy yourselves as you and other family members join together with your Ghanaian student in a journey of self- and cultural discovery.

Ghanaian Culture Quiz

Perhaps you already know a lot about Ghanaian culture. Or maybe you only know a little. In either case, you may find the following questions interesting. After you have taken the quiz, check the answers which follow. Regardless of whether you got the answer right or wrong, you'll want to read the sections referenced in the answer sheet.

1. T/F – Ghanaian families have the same meal patterns as those in the U.S.A.
2. T/F – Only wealthy Ghanaian students go to exclusive boarding schools.
3. T/F – Because English is the official language of Ghana we will have few communication issues with our student.
4. T/F – Ghanaians tend to be indirect communicators.
5. T/F – One evidence of the large extended families in Ghana is the number of “aunties” and “uncles” that a student has.
6. T/F – Pointing at a Ghanaian with the sole of one's foot is a cultural faux pas.
7. T/F – Polygamous families are culturally normal in Ghana.
8. T/F – Because most Ghanaians live in rural areas without street lights, they are very comfortable walking around outside in the dark and will forget to use a flashlight.
9. T/F – It will be helpful to introduce my Ghanaian student to other African-American families in my community because they have much in common.
10. T/F – Normally when I am ready to go somewhere my student will be ready as well.
11. T/F – If my Ghanaian student has the same religion as our family we can assume that he/she will feel comfortable in our church.

Answers to Ghanaian Culture Quiz

1. Ghanaian families have the same meal patterns as those in the U.S.A.
False – Many Ghanaians only eat two meals per day (see section on Food and Meals).
2. Only wealthy Ghanaian students go to exclusive boarding schools.
False – Most Ghanaian students, even those of very poor families, go to boarding schools (see section on Schools).
3. Because English is the official language of Ghana we will have few communication issues with our student.
False – There are many differences in words, word usage, and words with cultural significance (see section on Communication).
4. Ghanaians tend to be indirect communicators.
True – Ghanaians will often use proverbs to express themselves (see section on Communication).
5. One example of the large extended families in Ghana is the number of “aunties” and “uncles” that a student has.
False – While Ghanaians do have large extended families, the title of “auntie” or “uncle” is also extended to many outside of this extended biological family (see section on Greetings).
6. Pointing at a Ghanaian with the sole of one’s foot is a cultural faux pas.
True – there are many ways that people communicate nonverbally that may be perceived as negative to Ghanaian participants or U.S. Americans. (See section on Communication.)
7. Polygamous families are culturally normal in Ghana.
True – Nearly 20% of Ghanaian families are polygamous (see section on Family Makeup).
8. Because most Ghanaians live in rural areas without street lights, they are very comfortable walking around outside in the dark and will forget to use a flashlight.
False – Because of a belief in the supernatural (even by those who identify themselves as “Christian” or “Catholic”), many Ghanaian students are afraid of the dark (see section on Religion and Spiritualism).
9. It will be helpful to introduce my Ghanaian student to other African-American families in my community because they have much in common.
False – While their skin color may be similar, their cultural values (and behaviors) are likely to be entirely different (see section on Prejudice and Discrimination).

10. Normally when I am ready to go somewhere my student will be ready as well.

False – Because the Ghanaian concept of time is different than the U.S. American concept of time your student may not be ready. (see section on Time, Space and Privacy).

11. If my Ghanaian student has the same religion as our family we can assume that he/she will feel comfortable in our place of worship too.

False – In addition to the many variations within the same religion Ghanaian religions are often blended with African traditional religion (see section on Religion and Spiritualism).

Introduction

What is Culture?

Interculturalists have defined culture in the following ways:

- *"Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another."* — Geert Hofstede
- *"That whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, laws, morals, customs, and any capabilities or habits acquired by one as a member of a certain group. It is passed on from generation to generation, and it shapes our behaviors and structures our perceptions."* – Donna M. Stringer and Patricia A. Cassidy

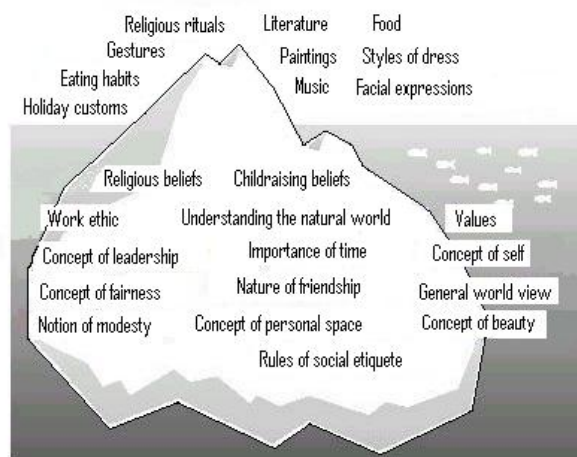


Culture is a set of behaviors, values, and beliefs created by groups of people, giving them a sense of community and purpose.

Its rules are often followed unconsciously. You may belong to any number of cultures, for example a workplace culture, faith culture, generational culture, and/or geographically defined culture. Each culture has its own set of characteristics that gives those within it a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves or, on the other hand, of being different from the norm for that culture.

The Cultural Iceberg

One way to understand the various parts of culture is by thinking about culture as if it were an iceberg. The iceberg shows that some elements of culture are above the surface of the water and are visible and we are aware of these aspects of culture because they are reflected in our **behaviors**. Other cultural aspects that lie under the water line are invisible, and they aren't obvious to us. These are what noted anthropologist Edward T. Hall calls the "hidden dimensions" of culture, and they include our **values, norms and beliefs**.



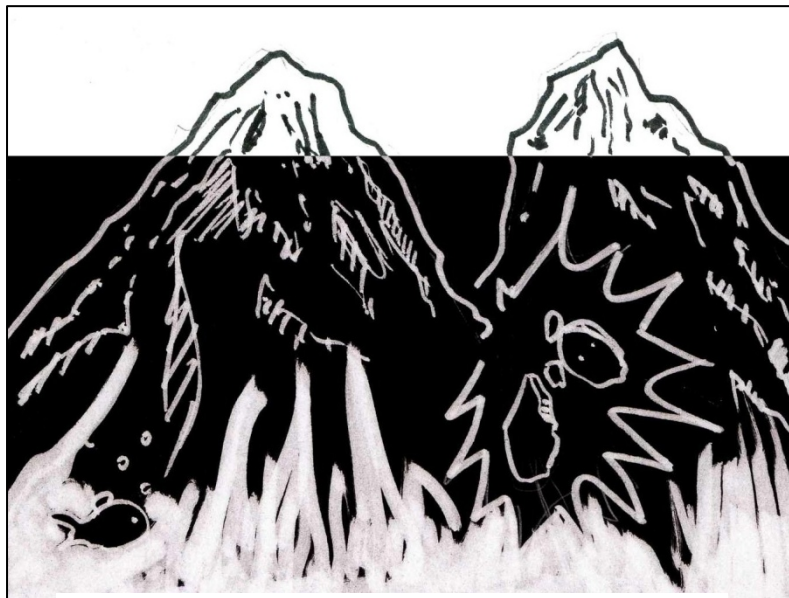
(<http://www.uop.edu/sis/culture/File/sec1-1-1h1.htm>)

The visible and invisible parts of culture interact with each other in ways that you probably don't normally stop to consider. For example, a common nonverbal behavior such as waving good-bye is visible, but what that gesture means is invisible. In one culture it could mean "good-bye," in another "come here," and yet another "go away."



When two cultures, like two icebergs, collide, the real clash occurs not in those visible differences but rather below the surface where values, beliefs and thought patterns conflict.

During the hosting experience you and your hosted participant may feel uncomfortable with a situation but don't quite know why. Chances are good that you are experiencing cultural differences "below the surface of the water." Being aware of this dynamic and the potential for learning that exists within it are a huge part of the cultural learning process.



Art by Michael Capozzola www.Capozzola.com

While your hosted participant is the newcomer in this scenario, as a host family member you too will have the opportunity to gain a new perspective on both Ghanaian and U.S. culture. This process of mutual enrichment and learning is what thousands of participants, host families, and natural families will tell you is at the heart of the hosting experience.

You may be wondering, "How can I learn about myself through contact with someone different from me?" It is most often through the contrast between the two, that new awareness and knowledge arise. In other words, you may not be aware of your own values, beliefs, and customs until you come into contact with someone whose values, beliefs, and customs differ from your own. The goal of this handbook is to help you build awareness of your own and your participant's culture in order to help you both have a more enjoyable and educational hosting experience.

Generalizations and Stereotypes

To help you along in this process of mutual discovery which the hosting experience presents, it is often useful to look to **cultural generalizations**.



Cultural generalizations are defined as the tendency of the majority of people within a culture group to share certain values, beliefs and behaviors. Generalizations do not apply to all people within a culture group, and so should be used only as a guide to understanding the group.

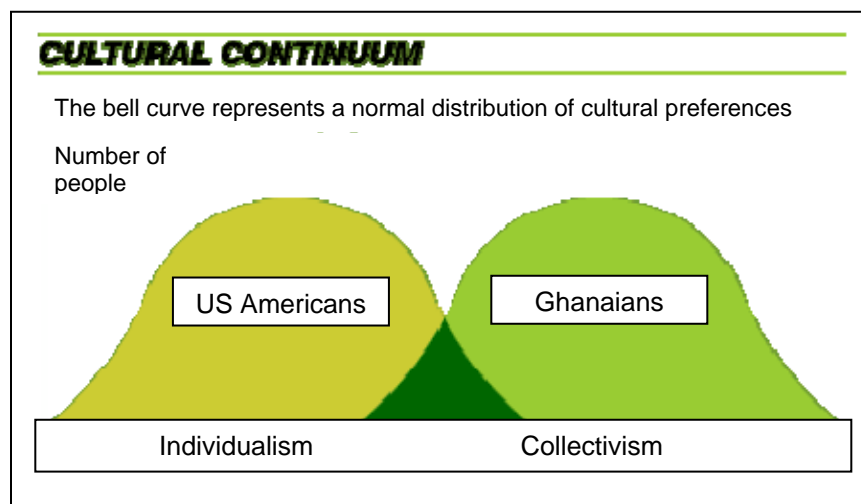
An example of a cultural generalization is the strongly held **U.S. American value of individualism**. U.S. Americans tend to like to do things themselves and see themselves as responsible for their own lives. These things are reflected in popular expressions such as “pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps.” Even the Nike slogan, “Just Do It” suggests that we control our own destiny. But this doesn’t mean that all Americans value individualism in the same way and to the same degree. Rather, on average, U.S. Americans hold this value and their culture views this as a positive.



Cultural generalizations must not be confused with cultural stereotypes, which are fixed ideas or exaggerated beliefs about every individual in the culture group. They are often negative in nature and not tested.

An example of a cultural stereotype would be “U.S. Americans are superficial and materialistic.”

To better understand the difference between cultural generalizations and stereotypes, please refer to the figure below.



On the left side, **individualism** (emphasis on well-being of the individual) is displayed and on the right side is the value of **collectivism**.

A collectivist culture is one in which the interests of the group, whether it be family, classmates, or community, are given priority over those of the individual. People from such cultures tend to avoid conflict and directly revealing their displeasure,

as we often do in the U.S. (For more information see the section on Family Life).

The mid-point of the bell curve for U.S. Americans shows that on average, individualism is the dominant cultural value. However, the curve also shows that some Americans are much closer to the collectivist value. Conversely, collectivism is the norm in the Ghanaian culture but some Ghanaians can be found on the individualist side.

The shaded area shows how certain U.S. Americans and Ghanaians may be more like each other on this trait than they are like the average U.S. American or Ghanaian person.



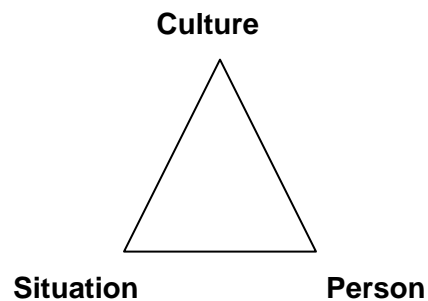
The bell curves show that there is a great deal of value diversity within each culture group, while at the same time there is a preferred or dominant cultural value.



“Do not try to lean on a wall that is not near you.” (Ghanaian proverb)

NKONSONKONSON or “chain link” is an Adinkra symbol of unity and human relations and a reminder to contribute to the community, that in unity lies strength.

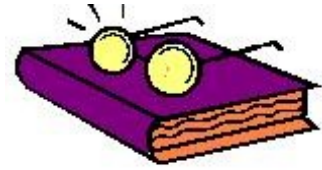
It is also important to keep in mind culture is not the only factor that influences behavior. People can differ in many other ways, such as their likes and dislikes, personalities, and life experiences. The situation at hand can also have an impact on how people behave.



Culture and Perception

Culture shapes your perception in the same way that what you see can be changed by the color of glasses you wear. For

example, if you were to look at a yellow car while wearing a pair of blue-tinted glasses the car would appear green. However, if you were to view the same yellow car through pink-tinted glasses, it would appear orange. Similarly, you and your participant may see the same situation with two different “cultural lenses” or sets of values, norms and beliefs. If you are not aware of the color of each other’s lens, in other words, the cultural context of a given situation, conflict and misunderstandings are more likely to occur.



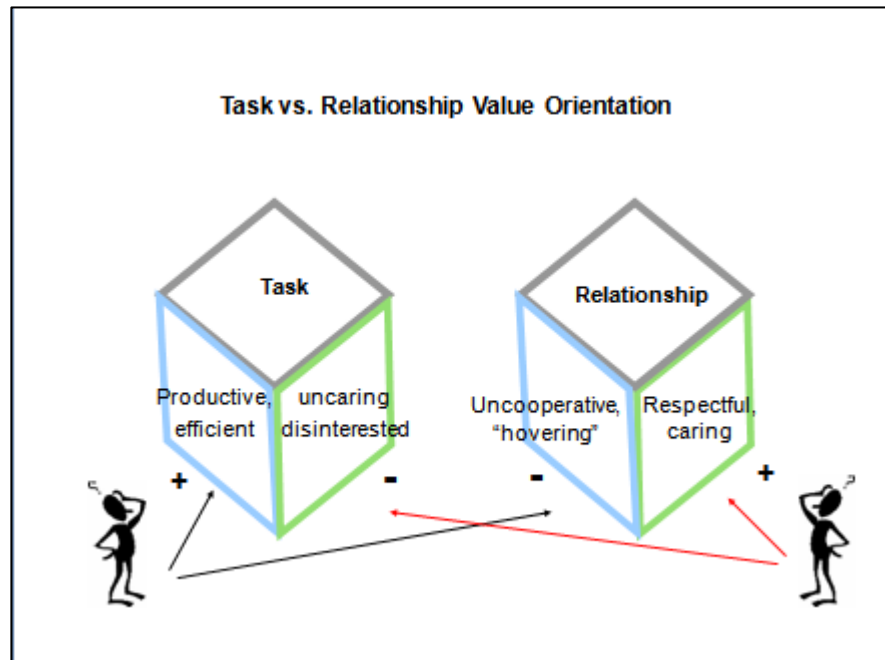
Take for example, the **task** vs. **relationship** value contrast. In general, U.S. Americans tend to view achieving a particular task or goal in a timely manner more important than developing or maintaining a relationship with those who may be involved in helping achieve that task or goal. In the U.S. it is acceptable for us to have only a superficial relationship with those with whom we interact to achieve a particular task and to directly question those involved when things don't appear to be going as planned. In Ghana, the norm is to strive to build a relationship with another before and simultaneous to embarking on a shared task and maintaining harmony within that relationship is generally more important than achieving the task in a timely manner, especially if the situation involves family members.

How might these differences play out in your hosting experience? Following is one possible scenario.

It's a typical, busy, weekday afternoon shortly after the arrival of your participant. Family members are now returning from school, work and various other activities. You need help unloading groceries, the dog needs to be fed, one sibling goes to her room to do homework the other installs himself on the computer. You get a call from your spouse who is running late. You say a quick hello to your student and ask him to unload the groceries so that you can begin to prepare dinner. He is dilly-dallying in your opinion, moving at a snail's pace, asking you about your day, telling you about his, wanting your advice on what he should wear to the assembly the next day. The phone rings and you move to another room to take the call so you can take notes on what you are expected to prepare for the next PTA meeting, he follows. You point in the direction of the car outside, gesturing as if carrying groceries. Your student looks confused, retreats to his room and emerges looking glum when called for dinner.

What happened here? How might the student perceive your behavior, how might you perceive the student's behavior? Figure 1 provides a likely explanation.

While other value differences are influencing the situation (see section on Family Life, Privacy, Space and Time) we will focus on the fact that the host parent is trying to accomplish the task of unloading the groceries so that she can begin making dinner while the student is seeking to connect with her by asking about her day, sharing what happened during his day, and eliciting advice from her. Having not retrieved the groceries, she perceives his behavior as uncooperative and “hovering” and he perceives her behavior as uncaring and disinterested since she did not taking the time to chat with him upon returning home.



U.S. Host Parent

Figure 1

Ghanaian Student

When this dynamic is at play, try to keep in mind the cultural context of the situation (or your student’s value orientation in this regard) and refrain from judging his or her behavior in a negative light.



Explain to your participant that your emphasis on getting things done in a timely manner does not mean you are not interested in or do not care for him or her, but rather it reflects your need to get many things done in a short amount of time. Schedule one-on-one time with your student if you are not able to make it happen spontaneously on a daily basis. This will help your student feel better integrated into the family.

Neither the student nor the host parent intended to displease the other, but a lack of understanding of the motivation for the other’s behavior has led to negative perceptions on both sides. The goal of this handbook is to bring to light differences you may encounter, generate understanding of these differences, and practical tips for dealing with them so that both you and the participant may have a more enriching and enjoyable experience.

Food and Meals



**“However small the pepper it will always have a sharp taste.”
(Ghanaian proverb)**

BESE SAKA or “sack of cola nuts” is a symbol of affluence, power, abundance, and plenty.

Food is often one of the very first items of “culture” that we think of when focusing on the culture of another country. Food, in addition to providing nutrition, also comes with traditions, associations and emotional components, along with specific flavor combinations. The Ghanaian diet and meal patterns are quite different than those of the U.S.A.

People in Ghana typically eat only twice a day, and they don't drink any beverages with their meals. They drink after they have finished eating.

Students in boarding school may have a more structured dining experience in which they converse with their tablemates, receive announcements, and need to stay “on schedule.”



In Ghana, mealtime is seen as a necessity, not a family event. At boarding school, the kids are only given 10 minutes to eat, while remaining silent the entire time. So, needless to say, since my family is big on having meals as a social time, it was a real adjustment for her to sit together at the table with us and share events of the day.

--U.S. Host Family

Most Ghanaians eat with the right fingers and not with cutlery. If your student has attended boarding school he/she may be experienced in the use of cutlery. If not, using a napkin and eating with knife, fork and spoon may take some learning and some practice. You will find your student eager to “do it right.”



He wasn't accustomed to having food from a supermarket. His family raised meat and had open markets to trade or purchase food. We eat with utensils and his family often eat with their hands.

--U.S. Host Family

While Ghanaians generally enjoy meat, fish, or chicken with their meals, these foods are too expensive for most people to eat regularly. The Ghanaian diet is supplemented with a variety of tropical fruits and vegetables. The most common foods include rice, cassava, corn, shea nuts, papaya, pineapple, coconut, oranges, watermelon, tomatoes, cabbage, bananas and plantains, peanuts, onions, palm nuts, coffee, and fish. Commonly served U.S. foods such as roast turkey, white bread, catsup, or marshmallows may seem strange to your student.



Host families should NOT expect immediate thrills and smiles when serving their favorite foods to their hosted student.

Most Ghanaians may enjoy hot and spicy food, so most of their meals are accompanied by a pepper sauce. Soups and sauces are also made from palm, peanut oil, garden eggs, tomatoes, onions, etc.

In rural areas of Ghana it is common to see men out in front of their homes pounding *fou fou* using a wooden mortar and long wooden pestle. *Fou fou* is a typical dish made from cassava (and sometimes combined with plantains) and is similar to our mashed potatoes.



Families hosting female students may wish to invite her to cook a meal (or part of a meal) regularly. Girls, especially those from rural areas, will often learn how to cook from their mothers.

Obviously there will be many new foods for your student to get used to and many of their “home country” foods that she/he will miss. Even foods that are found in both countries may be called by different names, e.g. an avocado may be called a “pear” or perhaps an “avocado pear.”

Ghanaian participants may be astonished by the large quantities of food and convenience foods bought in a single grocery shopping trip. In Ghana, it is common to go to the market nearly every day.

Schools and Educational System



“If you do not know where you are going, at least know where you have come from.” (Ghanaian proverb)

SANKOFA or “return and get it” is a symbol of the importance of the wisdom of learning from the past in building for the future.

Boarding Schools

Most senior high students in Ghana live in boarding schools and return home to visit their families during the school holidays around Christmas and Easter (breaks are between three weeks and a month long), as well as during the summer months from July to September. The boarding school system was developed as a convenient way of getting students not only organized to learn and accept new ideas and skills devoid of societal and family interferences, but also to educate them in an affordable fashion. Further, when Western education was introduced in Ghana there were few families with homes that had adequate furniture, lighting, and atmosphere to facilitate studying. This has not changed much for the 70 percent rural population. Even the Ghanaian elite make use of boarding facilities to offer their children a higher quality of education.

A teen that is used to a boarding school experience comes to a host family with a very different view of “family life” than one who has not attended boarding school. He/she may be used to a predictable/inflexible routine with meals, study hall, and bedtime, set at a prescribed time. There may be very little opportunity for the student to exercise individual, independent, and personal decision-making.



Explaining how the cafeteria system works and doing a “walk through” will be helpful. A host sibling or another “buddy” at school could be asked to do this.

Also be clear about the money involved—budgeting lunch money for the week may be a new experience for your student too.

All senior secondary schools, private or public, have their own prescribed school uniform. Students who are used to wearing uniforms may have difficulty at the beginning of their school year in knowing what to wear to school and having their clothing ready each day. Even cafeterias, which have many more choices than the canteen or food-service area in Ghanaian schools, represent the opportunity for personal choice and decision-making and may feel overwhelming for the student at first.



Your student may need help at first in deciding appropriate clothing. Be sure to address any “dress code” rules specific to his/her school to help avoid embarrassment and possible negative consequences.



At boarding school, they can be beaten for so many things: speaking while eating, not doing chores, being late, taking a shower too long...Lots and lots of reasons for the kids to get in trouble, and reprimanded.

--U.S. Host Family

Other Differences

The Ghanaian high school student comes from an educational system that is very different than that of most of the U.S. Teachers sound different, have different classroom rules, organize class sessions differently, treat homework differently, use a different grading system, etc. For example, in Ghana, while 80%-100% is given a grade of "A," this grade is rarely awarded. The host family will need to be alert to their student's adjustment in school and work closely with the student and his/her teachers to provide extra tutoring and academic support when needed.

Most students have been economically disadvantaged and there are few middle income families. Learning to live and adapt to an affluent U.S. home, family, school, and community may be a challenge for the student who comes from a setting with less emphasis on material goods and whose parents may be less educated than those in the host family. However, after a period of adjustment, Ghanaian students, like most teens, seem to adapt quite well to "having more."

Most, but not all Ghanaian high schools have science and computer labs. Those schools that are not as well equipped may have nearby facilities such as a "Science Resource Centre." It will be important for you, the host family, to determine your student's skill levels. You can be a big help in arranging for the extra support needed to catch up on the technical, as well as the cultural literacy which is essential for participation in a U.S. high school.

Your student will need to be informed about appropriate conduct (and the consequences of misconduct) at school, including permission to go off-campus, smoking, tardiness, etc.



Ghanaian students will not be accustomed to choosing their own courses and will need your help to decide their schedule.

A consultation between with your student's coach or club advisor is also recommended since these individuals will not likely be aware of the participant's inexperience with some sports or with rigid practice schedules.

Abbreviations such as "PE" used in course descriptions will require special explanation, as may course content dealing with anything other than strictly academic topics, music or art. Early on in the experience Ghanaian participants may also be overwhelmed by the volume of new people encountered on a daily basis and exhausted by the effort required to communicate and find their way around their new school. You can help your student by finding someone to accompany him/her from class to class during the first week of school.

The Student/Teacher Relationship

Student/teacher relationships in the U.S.A. are much less formal than those in Ghana.



My student was amazed at the difference in how students and teachers related here as opposed to her school experiences in Ghana. She was amazed that teachers actually seemed to like students and did so many extra things with them outside of the school day.

--U.S. Host Family



She loved the casual, friendly, kind attitudes of the teachers. She spoke of how harsh the teachers in Ghana could be.

--U.S. Host Family

In addition to processing American English, learning the schedule and layout of the school, and interacting with new acquaintances, the student needs to figure out the teacher's expectations.

In the U.S.A., students spend time and develop relationships with teachers through interaction with them in their roles as club advisors and coaches. Since these activities are not connected to the schools in Ghana, the opportunity for relationship-building is very limited.



Our student was shocked that we had a close personal relationship with several of the teachers at the high school. When one of his teachers stopped by to see my daughter he was floored and could barely speak. After the teacher left, the student told us how that would NEVER happen at his Ghanaian school.

--U.S. Host Family



Check-in with your participant's teachers early on in the experience to gauge both the teacher's perspective of the student's behavior in class as well as his or her academic performance. Feel free to share any of the information contained in this handbook with your participant's teachers in order to facilitate more effective communication between the teacher and the participant.

Parental Involvement

Some Ghanaian parents are not as deeply involved in school life or school activities as U.S. host parents tend to be. Online databases that exist in the U.S.A. to view a student's progress do not exist in Ghana.

If your Ghanaian student seems to have a negative perception of the strict monitoring of student performance and attendance by teachers, administrators, and parents alike, or expresses dislike it may be because the student feels as if she/he is not trusted and is being treated like a young child.



It may help to explain to your participant that monitoring school performance and attendance is motivated by a desire for the students to do well in school and that the involvement or interest of other school personnel in a student's life outside of school is generally sincere and well-intended.

Communication Styles

Differences in communication style and practices – both verbal and non-verbal – can be real roadblocks to understanding and can impede the integration of the participant into your family and community. Since effective communication is going to be the key to resolving issues in ALL other areas, having a common understanding of any differences in communication styles between you and your student early on is very important.

Ghanaians are generally warm, extremely friendly, open and sociable – even with strangers. They tend to be boisterous, which makes for animated arguments and celebrations. Tolerance and acceptance are typical individual characteristics.

Use of English

English is the official language and the language of business in Ghana. It is widely spoken in all the regions and taught at all levels right from primary class one to university. However, in many cases English is really a second language, as in their daily lives (away from school), Ghanaians will use the language of their particular ethnic group.

English is Ghana's official language partly as a remnant of British colonization and also because it serves to unify a country in which there are so many ethnic languages that no single one could effectively serve as the official language. The accent, rhythm, tone and vocabulary of Ghanaian English is very different than that of U.S. American English. For example, it is common to hear, "I'm coming" to indicate leaving the room with the intention of returning shortly, or to end a sentence with "uhuh" or "are we on track?"

It is easy to incorrectly assume that, because English is the official language of Ghana, your student will understand everything that is being said to and around him/her. Not only are U.S. American English and Ghanaian English very different from each other, but the student will also be lacking the "cultural literacy" associated with life in the United States that we may take for granted. It may be several months before the Ghanaian student understands everything.

Speak slowly! Confirm understanding by asking the student to repeat or demonstrate. Be aware of using idioms and slang. Write down the word if it does not seem to be understood orally. Confirm understanding by asking your student to repeat or demonstrate.



Use caution with humor, especially early in the year when you are just forming relationships with your student and he or she is still getting used to American English. Try to avoid using teasing, irony and sarcasm because such remarks can be easily misunderstood or misinterpreted.

References to times, places and events may need explaining, as will our proverbs and sayings which reflect our values and not necessarily those of Ghanaian culture.

Linear and Circular Communication Styles

In general, U.S. Americans have a very **linear** style of communication but Ghanaians generally have a **circular** style of communication. A linear style of communication gets to the point without any detours. Think of this style as developing along a straight line with A going to B, going to C, until the point is made which is then stated directly. With a circular style of communication the point of the conversation is rarely stated outright. Instead, the conversation might get to the point in a roundabout way, for example, through the telling of elaborate stories and anecdotes. Care is taken not to relay information in any way that could cause upset, whether that be giving someone bad news, turning down an invitation or refusing a request. Ghanaians strive to protect their own and others' face as well as maintain harmonious relationships.

Because of this difference in communication style, host families might initially view their student as being long-winded or vague, while the student may view the parent as inconsiderate or ineloquent (see Figure 2).

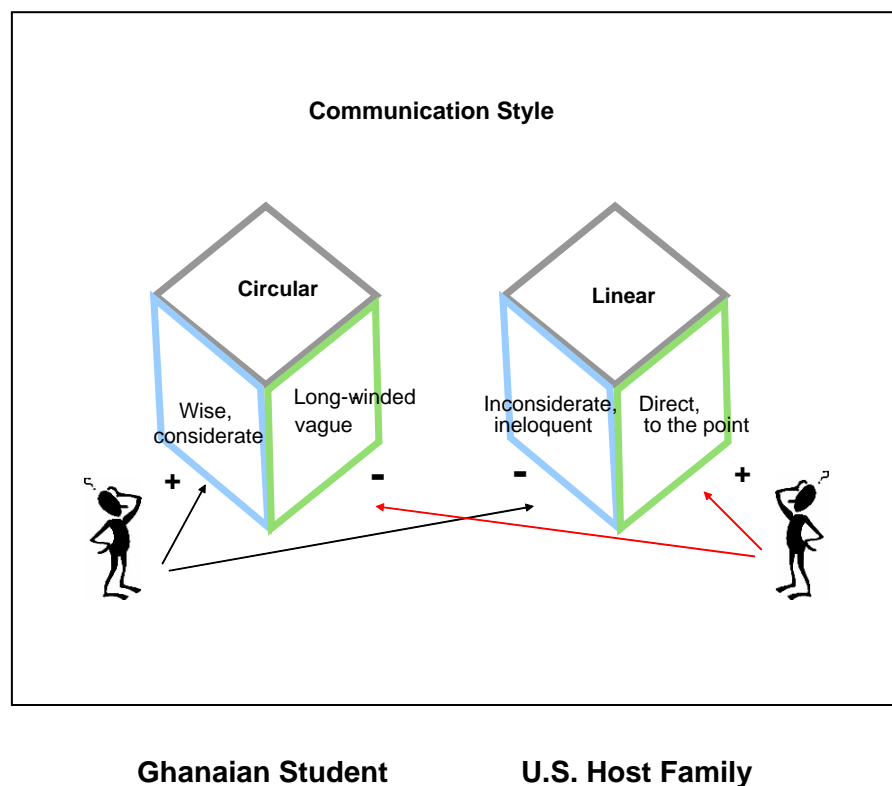


Figure 2

Greetings

Greetings are important in Ghanaian society. They are a sign of respect and concern for another person. To fail to greet is considered an insult. Time is always made for greeting and it is not seen as an interference or waste of time. Regardless of the gestures or words used in greeting, the act of greeting another person is extremely important. To ignore a greeting, or to fail to greet someone, is a serious insult to most Ghanaians. Your Ghanaian student may feel slighted or left out at first if not specifically greeted.



Taking the time to explain to your student how U.S. Americans greet/don't greet will help your student fit in and feel more comfortable.

In Ghana, before one begins a conversation, a general greeting such as *Good morning*, *Good afternoon*, or *Good evening* is necessary. When addressing a person of higher status or who is older, one follows the greeting with *Sir* or *Madam*. Most greetings are in the dominant local language and are followed by questions about one's health, the family welfare, the journey and so forth. One addresses new acquaintances by title and family (last) name. Friends and family members often use given (first) names.

About Names

Ghanaians may have Christian names such as Grace, Charity, Samuel or Emmanuel. In addition, they may be called by their day-of-birth name – throughout the whole country everyone understands and uses the name of the day of the week on which they were born. This day-you-were-born name is in addition to the person's given first name.

Day of the week	Male version	Female version
Sunday	Akwasi\ Kwesi	Akosua (Akos) Shortened form of Akosua
Monday	Kwadwo	Adwoa
Tuesday	Kwabena	Abena
Wednesday	Kwaku/Kweku	Akua/Ekua
Thursday	Yaw	Yaa
Friday	Kofi	Efua/Afua
Saturday	Kwame	Ama

Children refer to any adult who is well-known to the family as *auntie* or *uncle* (or *grandma* or *grandpa* for older people), even when they are not related. By the same token, adults of the same age might refer to each other as *brother* or *sister*, regardless of their biological relationship, and will use *auntie* or *uncle* for respected older people. Your student may be unsure what to call host family members, teachers, and volunteers and how to refer to them.



It will be helpful to your student to explain clearly what titles to use/not use with adults, i.e. teachers (Mrs. Smith, Mr. Jones), volunteers (Susie, Bob), family relatives (Paul, Mr. Davis, Grandma), etc.



It can be confusing when the student refers to individuals as “brother” or “sister” or “auntie” when he/she is referring to someone who was not listed on the student’s application as being a family member. When your student has been with you for a while it might be helpful for you to have a discussion about this so that you can eliminate any confusion and better understand the student’s custom.

In Ghana, a handshake is important when greeting most people and is much more frequently used than in the U.S. Generally a young person will wait for the adult to initiate the first contact. Between teens the two friends will shake hands and then snap their fingers.



She was very shy, so she was often quiet. She told us that at her boarding school in Ghana it was not typical for students of her age to engage in conversation with adults. That in fact, she had very little experience with adults, so it took her time to feel comfortable around adults she didn’t know.

--U.S. Host Family



She spoke almost in a whisper which made her difficult to understand.

--U.S. Host Family



Students will need help to learn the customs of the community in which they are placed (your community)--when and with whom they should shake hands and when it is not expected that they shake hands.

Muslims, who comprise 15%-20% of the population in Ghana (see section on Religion and Spiritualism) customarily avoid shaking hands with members of the opposite sex. Only the right hand may be used when extending a greeting (see below for more on this). From the Muslim student’s point of view, shaking hands with a person of the opposite sex in an effort to integrate means breaking a habit that he/she has had all of his/her life.



Volunteers or school personnel of the opposite sex may be surprised at a Muslim student’s hesitation to extend her/his hand and might perceive this reluctance as a negative response. Alerting teachers, extended family members, and family friends to the Muslim tradition of only shaking hands with members of the same sex may avoid this awkwardness and misunderstanding.

Nonverbal Communication

Silence is a common means of communication among Ghanaians. If someone is uncomfortable with a question or does not think the answer will be well received, he/she will say nothing rather than make the other person uncomfortable.

Ghanaians consider it impolite and an act of defiance for a child to look an adult in the eye. Sometimes U.S. American adults, including school personnel, interpret “looking down” as insolence or not paying attention.



It might be useful to remind your student’s teachers of this social characteristic as well as to “interpret” to your student how he/she may be perceived by others. By offering cultural awareness information ahead of time it may be possible to avoid awkwardness and misunderstanding later.

Ghanaians eat and greet with the right hand only. In addition, giving and receiving items is done only with the right hand. If one must use the left hand, an apology must be rendered before the left hand is used. The left hand is considered dirty and its use is considered disrespectful. U.S. Americans do not make this same distinction between right and left hands and may unintentionally offend their Ghanaian student.

Courtesy is important. Gesturing, eating, or passing items with the left hand is impolite. When yawning or using a toothpick, a person covers his/her mouth.

Among Muslims, and some other groups who often sit on the floor, it is improper to allow the sole of one’s foot to point at another person. Generally, a person does not place feet on chairs, desks, or tables – especially those being used by someone else. U.S. American families may unintentionally offend their student by the position of their feet.

Knocking the hands together, palms up, in front of the body can mean “please” or “I beg of you,” but can also convey thanks. Host family members may notice their student doing “strange” or unfamiliar gestures that, for the student, are as automatic as brushing one’s teeth.

In Ghana friends of the same gender may often and appropriately hold hands when walking or speaking to each other. Members of the opposite sex might also hold hands, but showing any more affection in public is less acceptable. However, in some U.S. American high schools it is not considered appropriate for students of the same sex to hold hands with each other and acceptable demonstrations of physical affection between boys and girls will also be different in different regions of the US.



Take time to explain some of these cultural differences in gestures to your student. Most of the time the “offense” that your student might perceive is unintentional and is simply due to another way of viewing the world. Your explanations and demonstrations of caring and interest will go a long way in helping your student to feel comfortable.



Your Ghanaian student will need a clear explanation of appropriate and unacceptable signs of physical affection. Standards of acceptability may vary between home/family, high school, community and church settings. Be sure to include local teens in the discussion to ensure that your student is receiving the most “up-to-date” information regarding behaviors with other teens. Such a discussion may also lead to talking about how homosexuality is perceived/ received in the US, as well as in Ghana.

Discuss the topics presented here with your student and explore to what extent you are each similar to or different from the cultural norm in your home country. Appendix A contains an activity to help you and your student further explore communication similarities and differences.

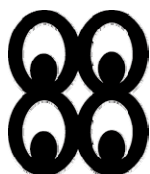
Family Life



“If your parents took care of you when you were teething, you should take care of them when they are losing their teeth.” (Ghanaian proverb)

“EBAN” or “fence” is a symbol of love, security and safety. The home is a special place. A home which has a fence around it is considered to be an ideal residence.

Individualism versus Collectivism



“Wisdom does not reside in one head alone.” (Ghanaian proverb)

“MATE MASIE” or “what I hear I keep” is a symbol of wisdom, knowledge, and prudence.

In Ghana the needs of the group (family, church, and community) take precedence over personal desires. According to social psychologist, Geert Hofstede,

Individualism pertains to a society in which ties between the individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

According to the Individualism Index the U.S. is rated at 91 and West Africa is rated at 20. In many U.S. families parents and children often separate to do their own individual activities. In contrast, Ghanaians generally sacrifice their own personal ambitions for the sake of the family unit. When given choices between activities your Ghanaian student may have a difficult time deciding what to do since she/he is so used to being a part of a group and doing what the group decides.



Students may need help to identify activity options. It may take some time for them to get used to the idea of “personal choice” and to discover their own personal preferences. Students may find assurance and feel less alone if they can do things with a “buddy,” perhaps another exchange student.

Gender Roles and Status

In Ghana, male dominance in decision-making has traditionally been the norm, although nowadays females are being encouraged to take leadership roles (heading institutions and making decisions for those institutions). Especially in the northern region women are expected to play a submissive role in everything. They are expected to be quiet, supportive, and respectful at all times. Your student *may* be unaccustomed and surprised at intra-family relationships in the U.S., especially those families in which the woman is the more dominant person. Host families and female peers *may* be surprised at the student’s closed attitude toward women and his/her narrower vision of what women can do and become. The host mother’s active participation in family, work, and community decision-making *may* be something new for your student and it *may* take some time for the student to understand “how it works” and whether the host mother’s decisions can be relied upon. If your student comes from a single parent family in which the mother is the head of the household your student may be more accustomed to female leadership or assertiveness.

Students may be surprised when asked to do a chore that in Ghana is considered to be traditionally one assigned to the opposite gender. However, his/her desire to be successful and learn about and adjust to his/her new host culture will often outweigh his/her need to hold onto traditional roles. Because Ghanaian society is gradually changing, some Ghanaian men now help their wives by doing household chores such as cooking and washing. Ghanaians traditionally show great respect to the elderly, the well-educated, the wealthy, persons with royal lineage, and persons who are noted for their hard work or integrity. They may be surprised at the behaviors of U.S. Americans, including teenagers, who tend to adopt an attitude of “equality” rather than of “hierarchy” and are much less formal in their conduct.



He seemed to have a deep respect for those in position of authority (e.g. parents, teachers) and did not question what they said.

--U.S. Host Family

Family Makeup

The size of the Ghanaian household might depend on whether the family is polygamous and also if they live in an urban or rural community. Members of a family might include father, mother, children, cousins, nephews, uncles, aunts, and grandparents. Extended families of three or four generations often share one household. For students coming from these large families a small U.S. host family will be a significant change. Elderly family members are deeply respected and exercise a great deal of influence on family decisions.

Recent studies have indicated that as many as one-fifth of Ghanaian families are polygamous. Students who come from polygamous families may be hesitant to share this with their host family. When the host family only has “part of the story” confusion and mistrust can result. The topic needs to be addressed gently in an attempt to understand the student's perspective and culture.



When she would talk about her family, sometimes she would make reference to her dad's other wife/family.

--U.S. Host Family

Some Ghanaian ethnic groups have a matrilineal family organization in which inheritance is passed through the wife's family; others are patrilineal. Regardless of how inheritance is passed, the oldest male leads most family organizations. He has financial responsibility for all who live with him.

Expectations for Children

Ghanaian teens are not generally as independent as their western counterparts since, as noted above, the needs of the family are more important than the needs of the individual.



Your host student might find it particularly difficult when personal issues arise to not consult his/her natural family. He/she will want to be a good son/daughter and act as his/her father or mother would want him/her to, even if the context is not the same.

--U.S. Host Family

The oldest child in the Ghanaian family is often expected to discipline his or her younger siblings. He/she is also responsible for some of the care of his/her siblings.

Caning and beating may be considered OK at home and at school – but if it is abused the teacher or older child may be in trouble.



Host families with younger siblings will need to discuss with their student what child care responsibilities the hosted student will have (if any), as well as the method of discipline in their family and any role that they student may or may not have in disciplining younger host siblings.

Daily Life

In Ghana neither washing machines nor clothes dryers are common. Hand washing of clothes is the norm. Underwear is considered to be very private and as such should be washed by oneself. The practice is for students is to hand-wash their clothes and iron them over the weekend.



Very happy with the basics. He always did his own laundry and ironing.

--U.S. Host Family



The host family will need to provide simple, clear and specific instructions on how laundry is handled in their home – including how to use the washing machine, the clothes dryer, location of the clothes line or drying rack, hand-washing facilities and what to do with underwear.

Your Ghanaian student may be accustomed to bathroom routines different than the ones in your home. He or she may need to be taught U.S. bathroom etiquette (how to use the shower and faucets and the toilet) and sleeping routines, including sleeping between the bed sheets.



She doesn't sit on the toilet seat. Clearly she stands when going to the bathroom, which causes the seat to get dirty more quickly. We had to ask her to wipe the seat off. Not a big deal.

--U.S. Host Family



He didn't sleep between the sheets at first. He had actually slept on the floor at home until he went to boarding school.

--U.S. Host Family

Household pets are not very common in Ghana, except perhaps birds and cats. It may be a new experience for your Ghanaian student to have a dog living inside of your house. In Ghana dogs are allowed to run freely out-of-doors (but perhaps not in the house) or they may be used as guard dogs. Although some Ghanaians may have dogs, they would not be allowed at the table, in the bedroom, or in the car!

Additionally, Muslim students may consider dogs to be unclean (see Appendix D for further important details).



Our hosted student often expressed shock and incredulity at seeing a dog in a car! "They get treated better than people," he exclaimed.

--U.S. Host Family



A dislike for indoor family pets. In her case, this is extreme and she cannot touch or be touched by them. .

--U.S. Host Family



Pay particular attention to the student's application and what he/she indicates about pets. Students may be unaccustomed to even being near an animal and will need to be taught how to behave and how to avoid/control the animal. Students may be very fearful of animals. Observe and respect your student's reactions and work together to find ways to help him/her feel more comfortable.

It would be considerate of the host family not to expect any Muslim student to do chores associated with dogs. It is especially important that the Muslim student's prayer areas be free of dog hair, saliva, etc. (For more detailed information see Appendix F "Cultural Tip Sheet for YES Students.")

Host families will need to help their student to know the "family rules," the chores and responsibilities expected of them, how free-time works, roles within the family, etc. Generally they will be very cooperative as they are used to having responsibilities in boarding school.



In the first weeks teach your student about banking, post office routines, banking, phone cards, personal safety, etc.

Teen Behavior Issues

Alcohol use/abuse is not an issue among teens in Ghana. Alcohol use is looked down upon for all ages and although it is not against the law, religious teachings restrict and guide its use. Alcohol is served to adults at funerals, naming ceremonies, festivals, and marriage ceremonies. Palm wine is a local artisan product.

The legal driving age in Ghana is 18, but most families do not have cars and therefore teen driving is not an issue. Your hosted student may need to be reminded to use a seat belt and practice other auto passenger safety measures.

It is not common for Ghanaian teens to smoke – only some boys away at school might do so. (They may also engage in drinking alcohol). Smoking is considered shameful and looked down upon for both teens and adults. The smell of tobacco may be unusual and offensive to your Ghanaian student.

Dating and Marriage

In Ghana, many families still arrange their children's marriages, although children have the right to reject undesirable arrangements. Dating and pre-marital sex are frowned upon by society so young people of the opposite sex are not expected to date each other and they are discouraged from engaging in pre-marital sex. However, a growing number of urban youth are adopting Westernized dating practices.

Some boarding schools are single-sex (although they may organize a social dance for their students and guests) and churches may not offer such social opportunities as dances (although there are opportunities to interact in Sunday schools and other church activities). Your student many not have had as much social interaction as most U.S. American teens.



Your Ghanaian student will probably be unfamiliar with U.S. American traditions such as homecoming and "the prom." If you know that such an event is approaching, raise the subject with your student and talk about his or her expectations in this regard. There may be budgeting concerns as well as the

need for information is expressed about what generally happens leading up to and during such an event is—a special dinner, corsage, pictures before or during the event, etc.

Offering non-threatening social opportunities such as large group orientations (for your exchange organization), as well as membership in school clubs, music groups, etc. provides a way for your student to gain confidence and experience in learning to interact comfortably and appropriately with the opposite sex.

Prejudice and Discrimination



“The eyelid and the eyeball should not quarrel.” (Ghanaian proverb)

“BIN NKA B”I or “no one should bite the other” is a symbol of peace and harmony. This symbol cautions against provocation and strife.

Racial diversity is minimal in Ghana. More than ninety-nine (99.8) percent of the people in Ghana are black African. Your student may come with his/her own prejudices toward Caucasian (non-black) Ghanaians and this prejudice could easily and unconsciously be transferred to Caucasian Americans. It is common for Ghanaian children to chant “*obruni, obruni*” when they see a white person (“Obruni” is the term that Ghanaians use to refer to any light-skinned person – male or female). Your student has always been in the majority and may never have known a white person before becoming an exchange student, nor is it likely that she/he will have interacted with a black American before.



Our hosted student expected to be treated just as unique and special in a white majority society as white persons were treated in her society. When she was treated as “just another black person,” it had a significant negative impact on her.

--U.S. Host Family

Within this category of black African, there are five major ethnic groups in Ghana (see Appendix C). These ethnic groups differ significantly in their language, food, ceremonies, and customs and beliefs. Even though there are significant cultural differences, intermarriage between ethnic groups is considered acceptable.

Ghanaians are proud of their status as the first sub-Saharan colony to gain independence from a European power. Although greatly influenced by Western civilization, the people are striving to develop a nation and culture that is uniquely African. Western visitors who act, or give the impression of being, superior because they come from economically advanced nations are offensive to Ghanaians.

Many U.S. Americans may assume that the cultures of Africans, West Africans, and African Americans are all the same and that friendships will be easily formed and a bond automatically felt between your student and black members of your family or community. It is important to be aware that while they may have similar skin colors, there are very significant cultural differences.

Being a racial and/or religious minority in a family, in school, or in a community will be a totally new experience for your Ghanaian student. Even what seems to us to be “positive” attention may be discomforting for them.



It is extremely important to be alert for any signs of racial or religious prejudice in school or the community. Bringing up the topic of prejudice early will let your student know that prejudice is not “off-limits” for discussion, and that in fact you will want to know if any pejorative remarks or behaviors are occurring.

Becoming acquainted with other ethnic groups (such as Caucasian, Asian, African, Caribbean and Native American, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern) will most likely be a new experience for your Ghanaian student. Ghanaian students may base their impressions of other nationalities on Asian and South American movies and TV programs that they have seen in their home country.

Cultural Identification

Because of the collectivist nature of Ghanaians (see section on Family Life), Ghanaian students tend to have a very close identification with other Ghanaians (and West Africans). The quotes below are indicative of this:

The Ghanaians hang together. Once he arrived, many Ghanaian people “kept an eye on him” for the family back home.

--U.S. Host Family

On the negative, however, was that she would get phone calls from back home during the wee hours. They were eight hours ahead and would call about 0400-0600 even though our student would ask them not to...

--U.S. Host Family

He took every opportunity to be with Ghanaians. There is a small community of west Africans in our area. They were very welcoming to him...

--U.S. Host Family

Be prepared for a lot of contact from Ghanaian families here in the U.S. They are very well-organized.

--U.S. Host Family

There are both positive and negative aspects to this contact. On the positive side, having some familiar cultural contact at the beginning of the exchange experience can help ease the transition from the student’s home culture. Also, any local contacts can be useful to the host family in finding appropriate resources to deal with such things as hair cuts for the Ghanaian student (see section on Personal Appearance later in this handbook).

However, if this contact continues at a high level past the beginning months of the exchange experience it can interfere with the student's integration into your family. Contact your exchange agency for assistance in monitoring your student's communication and adjustment to aid in preventing host family integration difficulties.

Money and Affluence

**“The best way to improve your memory is to lend people money.”
(Ghanaian proverb)**



“MMUSUYIDEE” or “that which removes bad luck” is a symbol of good fortune and sanctity.

The cedi is the national currency of Ghana. The average per capita income in Ghana is approximately \$400.

Ghanaian students are used to getting along with little. Pure, clean running water coming out of a faucet, microwaves, a large selection of clothing, and individual beds may all be new and amazing experiences, unless your student comes from a large urban area.

For a Ghanaian student to have money of his/her own and to be responsible for managing it may also be a new experience if his/her father has managed all the family income in the past. If your student has attended boarding school, it would be helpful for you to talk with her/him about her/his experiences in managing her/his school “housekeeping” money.

Having a credit/debit card or a checking account for use during the student's stay in the U.S. may be something with which the student needs assistance.

Being here and having a bank account is a very big deal for me. I've never had the privilege of managing my own money; banking is a whole different thing for me. Therefore I really feel away from home and realise I'm on my own now and need to be as responsible as I can. It seems thrilling to me writing checks and using a debit card for purchases. It appears insignificant but it makes me feel responsible.

--Hosted Student from Ghana

Bargaining in markets is very common in Ghana, so students would likely appreciate an explanation of the U.S. system of fixed prices PLUS tax.



Your student will most likely need help and information about how to manage his/her money – how to budget, what possible expenses might come up, how to safeguard cash and savings, and how to access money that has been deposited.



Our hosted student arrived with all her spending money for the year in cash. She had ten \$100 bills in her purse and had no idea of the safety implications. That was one of the very first cultural issues we had to address.

---U.S. Host Family

Students who are here on a scholarship which includes a monthly stipend may receive pressure from their natural family to save that money for when they return home. Exchange agencies intend that this monthly stipend be used for such things as telephone use, school lunches, clothing, movies, McDonald's, school supplies, toiletries, prom, souvenirs, etc.



It may be necessary and important to explain to your Ghanaian student that spending some the stipend on such things as social events will allow her/him to experience an aspect of U.S. culture that she/her might not otherwise. In the U.S. our friendships are often initiated and based on shared interests. The opportunity for this kind of immersion (joining other teens for movies, skating, school dances and school sports events) into our culture is what the international exchange program is intended to provide and the stipend is designed to help participants achieve this. By helping the participant create a budget which includes funds for personal items, social events, and savings, you will help her/him get the most out of the experience while honoring her/his strong family ties.

Personal Appearance



“An antelope does not wear the shoes of an elephant.” (Ghanaian proverb)

“DUAFE” or “wooden comb” is a symbol of beauty and cleanliness – symbols of desirable feminine qualities.

Ghanaian dress is generally conservative. Nearly everyone considers it important to be clean and properly dressed in public. Therefore, it is unlikely that your student will dress in an offensive or culturally inappropriate manner. However, they will be observing very carefully what others are wearing and will try to fit in as much as possible. The first day of school may be a stressful occasion as your student makes her/her first appearance with an important new peer group.

In Ghana casual dress is the rule for most occasions, although a suit and tie or dress is required for more formal events. Shorts are not acceptable public attire. Western dress is standard in most areas, but officials often wear traditional clothing for ceremonial occasions. We encourage students to wear traditional clothing for those occasions in which they will have a chance to share their culture with their host communities. Your Ghanaian student's traditional dress may be printed with Adinkra symbols which you will want to ask him/her more about.

Muslim men wear robes similar to those worn by Arab Muslims, except that the Ghanaian version is more colorful.

Ghanaian culture suggests that regardless of what one wears, the design of the cloth can reflect one's status. Women generally prefer bold colors and large prints.

Ghana is a tropical country (cold and snow will be new experiences for your Ghanaian student), so cold weather clothing is not needed or available. It will be important for host families to help their student obtain cold weather clothing if needed



Asking your student to explain the symbols and proverbs on her/his clothing will help your family understand the student's "world view" and will promote student pride.

Because of their economic status, some students may come with few clothes, or with used clothing with visible repairs.



The host family will need to be alert to clothing needs and to help the student determine appropriate attire within his/her budget. Some students may use a one-time incidental allowance to buy winter clothing; others may appreciate the option to have these items loaned to them since they will not have a use for them when they return home.

Students will need shoes for sports and other specialized activities.

Because Ghanaian students are generally modest, your student may be surprised to see siblings or parents in their underwear or only covered with a bath towel. They may also feel uncomfortable changing and showering for gym class or having a physical exam for a sports team.

Students may not have brought a swimsuit and, like many teens, may feel self-conscious wearing one. Your student may not know how to swim.



Provide a bathrobe at home. Also explain the routine for gym class before they encounter it at school. Alert the physical education teacher/coach ahead of time. Offer a t-shirt (and shorts) to be worn over the swimsuit. It is very important that your student understands safety in and around the water and that he/she wears a life-jacket when needed.

Scarification

The term used in Ghana is "tribal marks." It is traditional, especially in the northern region of Ghana, for incisions to be made on the face of a child between the ages of two to six years of age. These "tribal marks" serve to identify the child as a member of a specific clan or tribe. Many different tribes follow this ritual which is performed on both males and females by a designated tribal person. Students from these northern areas may have tribal marks which may be considered examples of "collectivism" and cultural identification. (See Appendix B References and Further Reading for additional information on this subject.)

Health and Well-being



“Hate has no medicine.” (Ghanaian proverb)

“HYE WON HYE” or “that which does not burn” is a symbol of imperishability and endurance. It gets its meaning from traditional priests that were able to walk on fire without burning their feet, an inspiration to others to endure and overcome difficulties.

Each culture defines health/wellness-illness-disease in its own way. The cause, mode of transmission, treatment and cure for an illness may be interpreted very differently in Ghana than in the U.S. Who the appropriate person to ask for help is, and when and how to go to the health practitioner during an illness, are culturally determined. The appropriate environment for a sick or injured person may also vary according to culture.

The distinction between body-mind and the relationship between illnesses of the body-mind can be particularly Western concepts and may not be a part of the Ghanaian cultural framework. In Ghana there is much less separation between mind-body than in the U.S. The definition of mental illness is highly culturally determined.

Many Ghanaians rely on herbal medicine and traditional healing. Ghanaian law recognizes traditional healing and makes it a partner of Western medicine within the national health system. It is common for people to go to prayer camps to be healed, especially if the Western-style medical practitioner does not seem to be able to cure the condition (e.g. paralysis from polio).

If your student becomes ill or injured he/she may need a great deal of emotional support and may expect herbal medicine treatments in addition to a consultation with a health care practitioner.



It will be extremely important to find out what your student is imagining, thinking, and worrying about when he/she is suffering from an illness, accident, or injury. Reviewing instructions from the health practitioner and allowing your student to talk about them is one way to learn what your student is thinking and needing. It will help the host family to better understand their student’s needs and to better explain what is expected.

Ghana has a lower life expectancy and a higher infant mortality rate than that of the U.S. Because of the risk that the newborn might not live, a baby is not considered a member of society until he/she is 8 days old. It is common for the father to name the baby.

Nursing schools and medical schools in Ghana are very good, however, the number of medical personnel is considerably less than in the United States (Ghana has about 1 doctor for every 16,000 people). The physical exam required for becoming an exchange student may be one of the few doctor visits that your student has experienced. Diseases such as malaria are not unusual. Also, dental checkups are not a regular occurrence – your student may have never been to a dental office, but only to a mobile clinic which may have come to his/her school.



Our hosted student had an impacted wisdom tooth that had to be removed while she was staying with us. Even after following all the proper protocol and working with her natural family she was very emotional at the oral surgeon's office. It was only later that we found that the dentist in Ghana would not have used anesthesia and that she had no understanding of our discussion about using it here.

--U.S. Host Family

Culture also plays an important role during illness or injury in determining what the appropriate foods to eat or to avoid are, what medications should be taken, and what activities/behaviors are appropriate or inappropriate.



When anyone is ill, they are even more emotionally vulnerable. Your student may need to talk directly with her/his natural family and of course, the natural family will be extremely concerned and need assurance too. The host family and local support coordinator must work closely with exchange agency staff to follow established protocol and accomplish satisfactory communication.



When one of her classmates was in the hospital she was terrified for him. She said in Ghana people cry and scream a lot while experiencing difficult times. As a culture they display this fear more outwardly than we do.

--U.S. Host Family

Personal Hygiene and Grooming

Hair and Skin Care

Your Ghanaian student may be used to specific kinds of skin creams, hair care products and grooming aids.



Host families will need to familiarize themselves with their student's grooming needs (hair and skin care) and help him/her find the appropriate resources and/or products. Communities with very few African-Americans may not have hair care salons or products that meet the specific needs or wants of a black population, so host families may need to expand their search to on-line sources or nearby cities.

A Special Note for Girls

Tribal views, myths and taboos surrounding menstruation vary within Ghana, however, in general adolescent girls are often absent from school due to menstruation related issues, arising from inadequate water for washing, lack of soap, no privacy, non-functioning or inadequate toilets and no disposal facilities. Your student will likely not be as familiar with the large variety of feminine hygiene products available in the U.S. and will need some guidance in this area. In addition, her needs regarding rest/activity, privacy, diet, etc. during menstruation may be different than those of U.S. teens.



The host mother will be the most likely person to talk with her Ghanaian daughter about care and needs during menstruation.

A Special Note for Boys



He mentioned that going to a boys' school was so different, they could get up without caring about themselves and go to school. He said that here you have to put a lot into your appearance and smelling good...

--U.S. Host Family

In general, the use of deodorant and deodorizing body soap is more common in the U.S.A. than in many other countries, including Ghana. Your student may not be accustomed to using deodorant on a daily basis and may need guidance as to which products to purchase and their use.

If strong body odor is an ongoing issue, it may helpful to enlist the help of another male exchange student or host sibling or father who can explain the negative reaction that his peers are likely to have to strong body odor. If your student arrived with few articles of clothing and/or undergarments (for more information see *Personal Appearance*) purchasing additional items and reinforcing the need to launder clothes, bedding and towels regularly (including how to do so) may help.

Time, Space and Privacy

Time, space and privacy are some of those cultural components that are not generally discussed; however, the impact of their importance hits us when differences clash with our expectations. When one is in his own environment, one does not realize the effects of notions toward time, space, and privacy. Often it is not until one experiences a contrast does he realize that something is very different. U.S. Americans and Ghanaians have many differences in our interpretations of time, space and privacy of which we are generally not conscious.

Time



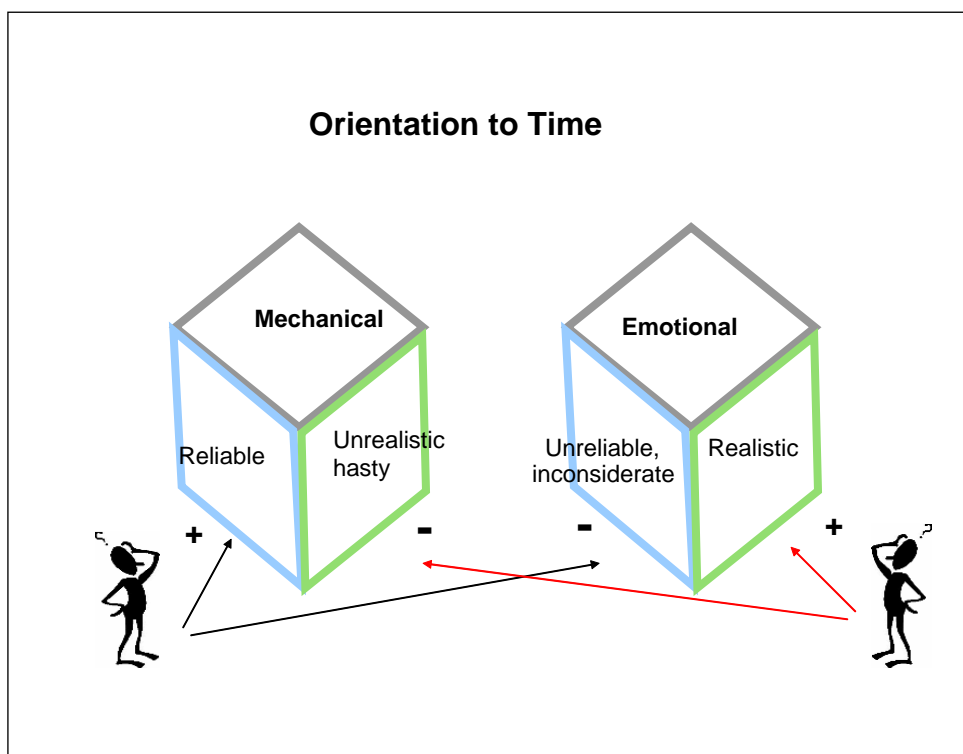
“OSRAM” or “moon” symbol represents patience. You need to show patience when awaiting a particular event or outcome.

U.S. Americans are often geared to productivity and we consider an “agenda” that is divided into 15 minute increments to be within the norm. The advice that “Time is money” is an indication of this view of time. However, as author Bert Hamminga notes,

*Instead of hours and numerical dates, Ghanaians traditionally rely on emotional marks of time, like when you were born, when you married, when you had your first child, when there was a war.... The difference between the Western **mechanical** and the African **emotional** time-consciousness is a highly instructive one... Of course Westerners also experience emotional time. Important events in your life, say a new job in another town or a baby, “mark” your past in that some events will later be experienced as before or after this or that important event.*

In the U.S. we often have tight schedules that do not include time to socialize, but in Ghana time is always made for greeting and greetings are not seen as an interference or waste of time (see section on Greetings).

These differing views of time are related to our respective culture’s relationship to nature. In the U.S. we generally strive to control or dominate nature, in order to fuel our highly industrialized society, whereas Ghanaians tend to believe that is futile to attempt to control the forces of nature. Why plan too far ahead if some force of nature may change your plans? A heavy rain is seen as gift from nature and therefore one should not be upset if it delays a meeting or project.



U.S. Host Family

Figure 3

Ghanaian Participant

In Figure 3 the Ghanaian participant perceives the host parent’s focus on planning ahead and sticking to a schedule as hasty or unrealistic, and perhaps even unwise, as who knows what wonderful opportunities or unfortunate obstacles may arise along the way! On the other hand, the U.S. host parent perceives the Ghanaian as unreliable or inconsiderate because the student does not adhere to a schedule. Both the student and the host parent have the intention of

“getting the most out of the day” but the U.S. American host parent views scheduling as an effective method to get the most out of the day, while the student views being open in order to take advantage of whatever opportunities might come along as the way to do so.

If family members and participants are aware of this difference, they may be able to avoid misinterpretations about each other’s behavior and intentions.



In the Ghanaian culture the present has to do with “...social interaction, community life, and using the opportunities the day brings...the interaction of all forces of nature around your community and your community's attempts to profit from the opportunities revealed, or "given," to it now.”



It might be enriching for the host family to provide the hosted student with an opportunity to describe their day/week/month (listen to how your student describes it – as relationships, a series of events, a minute-by-minute chronology, a circular pattern, or perhaps something else).

Posting a written schedule might help your student and allowing plenty of time might help you!

Space and Privacy



“Do not call the forest that shelters you a jungle.” (Ghanaian proverb)

“FIHANKRA” or “house/compound” is a symbol of security and safety. Typical of Akan (Asante) architecture, the communal housing compound has only one entrance and exit.

In the U.S. Americans often place great value on personal privacy. We speak of needing “our own space,” a concept which would be very unfamiliar to most Ghanaians. U.S. American homes offer individual bedrooms, separate rooms for eating, studying, talking on the telephone, and watching television. Individual family members may often be found spread out in different rooms in the house. In Ghana, with large families, the extended family system, and the sociable nature of Ghanaians, privacy in the home is negligible. There is always someone nearby and available to talk and relate to.

In the U.S. people often stand at about arm’s length when conversing, but you may notice that your student tends to stand closer to you than you are accustomed to. Host families may feel as though their Ghanaian student is “underfoot” and host siblings may feel crowded or express desire for “alone time” without their hosted student “hovering” nearby.



It will be helpful for host siblings to be informed early on that their student may be most comfortable when he/she is physically close-by someone and that “privacy” is something that Ghanaians are not used to and do not expect.



It will be important to explain to the Ghanaian student that a host family member's desire for greater personal space does not mean that he/she is being rejected, nor that he/she is "unlikable," but rather that U.S. Americans are generally accustomed to having more personal space and privacy than most Ghanaians.

Sometimes Ghanaian students are not accustomed to coming home to an empty house (because of working parents, host siblings out doing school or extracurricular activities) and may feel alone and lost upon doing so. On the other hand, if your student's parents are both employed he or she may be used to coming home to an empty house. If your student lives in the city, he or she may have household help who will take care of the children until the parents return from work.



It will be helpful if host families provide a timetable (in writing) that outlines when the student can expect other family members to return home. Provide snacks (or instructions on how to prepare their own snacks/meals) if no one is going to be around to do so. Suggest after-school activities for the student to participate in that will provide socializing with others.

Religion and Spiritualism



"If you understand the beginning well, the end will not trouble you." (Ghanaian proverb)

"GYE NYAME" or "except" for God" is a symbol for the supremacy of God. This unique and beautiful symbol is ubiquitous in Ghana. It is by far the most popular for use in decoration, a reflection on the deeply religious character of the Ghanaian people.

More than half of all Ghanaians (69%) belong to one of several Christian churches, and another 15 to 20 percent are Muslim. In addition, other religions such as Buddhism are also present. However, traditional African beliefs and practices play a major role in society and may be retained regardless of any other religious affiliation. At least one-fourth of the population exclusively worships according to traditional/indigenous beliefs.

Many of Ghana's Christians and Muslims combine their faith with traditional African beliefs and practices. This traditional faith is characterized by a belief in a Supreme Being who has created all things and has given various degrees of power to all living (animate) and non-living (inanimate) things. Out of respect for the Supreme Being, who cannot be approached directly, some Ghanaians often communicate with him through intermediaries. Intermediaries can include animate or inanimate objects, as well as ancestor spirits. It is especially common for people to seek guidance through their ancestors. Accordingly, ancestor veneration is an

important aspect of Ghanaian culture. In addition, a reverence for all living things and a belief in wizards, witches, demons, magic potions, and other supernatural phenomena collectively known as *juju* (voodoo) may be a part of the Ghanaian's spiritual life. Thus it is quite likely that your Ghanaian student may have a "world view" that is different than yours, and one that may also be different from that of other persons you know who also describe themselves as "Christian," "Catholic," or "Muslim."

Ghanaians are generally very spiritual and religion plays an important role in their life. They tend to be very tolerant of religions and religious practices that are different than their own. There is very little religious discrimination. The missionary influence in Ghana is huge – every conceivable church (both mainstream and evangelical) is represented by their schools, clinics, and hospitals, as well as their usual religious activities. The focus on moral character which religion offers contributes to the country's stability.

In Ghana there are significant overlaps with religion and culture. Many non-Muslim students might exhibit "cultural remnants" of Islam in their daily practices and interaction with others that have little or nothing to do with whether they are Muslim, but these are nonetheless an important part of their cultural identity.



Your student's application will ask for "religion" and provide a place for the student to indicate how frequently he/she practice this religion. Behind the student's brief response will be a vast array of religious practices and expectations that the student takes for granted and which may be entirely unfamiliar to the host family. Discussing these perspectives with your student will be both useful and informative.



He is a lot more conservative than most teens I've known. Believes in his faith. Respects elders.

--U.S. Host Family



She was Muslim, but did not practice her religion here. She stopped wearing her head covering.

--U.S. Host Family

Some students, whether Muslim or Christian, may believe in the supernatural, witches and curses, and be afraid of the dark!



Camping and other activities "in the dark" or with unknown surroundings may be difficult and your student may need extra reassurance and understanding. He/she may also need help to distinguish reality from fiction (on TV programs and movies for example). Halloween activities may need explaining.



There was a full eclipse of the moon which I wanted to see and all of the family to experience as well. We needed to go up the street (perhaps 150 feet) so that the trees would not block our view. But our student would only go if I drove her in the car.

--U.S. Host Family

Symbolism and proverbs are used by various ethnic groups and individuals to express feelings, traditions, and state of affairs.

Religious Holidays

Christians in Ghana look forward to such holidays as Easter, Christmas, and Boxing Day (the day after Christmas – when gifts are given). The most important Muslim holidays in Ghana include the three-day feast called *Eid-al-Fitr* at the end of Ramadan and *Eid-al-Adha*, the Feast of the Sacrifice. The dates for these Muslim holidays are based on the lunar calendar and will therefore change each year.

Holidays are often a time when students feel especially homesick. They miss the closeness of their natural family and the traditional celebrations that have always been a part of their life. If the host family celebrates the holidays or holy days that would, of course, be easiest for the hosted student. Students are prepared before coming to understand that the way in which holidays are celebrated in the U.S. will not be the same as in Ghana. It would be helpful if you explore this area with your participant to find out which ones are important to him/her.

Exchange students are generally eager to experience Thanksgiving and other typically “American” holidays because nothing similar is celebrated in Ghana. You may especially enjoy seeing these celebrations from your student’s eyes and at the same time your student will need explanations about what to expect and what is expected of them.



In Ghana at Christmas time children would most likely receive a new dress.

It would be helpful to the student if she/he could telephone home on the holiday. Host families could expect that their student might feel sad, though generally the student will appreciate being invited to join in host family activities and will find participation a welcome distraction. At the same time it will be helpful if host families are able to empathize with their student’s feelings.

For the Muslim student living in a non-Muslim host family, spending the holy days during the month of Ramadan away from friends and family will require a great deal of adjustment (see Appendix F for details of Muslim student religious needs).



My student came from a Christian family, so the traditional Christian holidays are VERY important in terms of celebrating with family. In fact, family that he never met who reside in the U.S. would invite him for the holidays...--U.S. Host Family

Role of Religion

The role of religion in the United States has some similarities to that of education. Just as the U.S. education system (especially at the high school level) is much more than academics and is the center of student social and sports life, so religion includes more than just the spiritual. For those families who are involved in a local religious community, in addition to being a center for their spiritual life, it is a place where many social contacts are made – not just for the parents, but for the children and teenagers as well.

Despite these similarities in the role of the religion in each society many other differences in religious practices exist, even within the same religion. In Ghana churches offer teens the opportunity to interact with each other through Sunday schools and other church activities as well.

If your family holds a more scientific approach to life and your student has a more faith-based approach, it may be helpful to remind yourself of the AFS motto “It’s not right, it’s not wrong, it’s just different.”

Religious Practices and Related Needs

Your student may be accustomed to attending religious services or praying more frequently or differently than your family. Christian church services in a Ghanaian church may last for four hours, be noisy rather than solemn, and be filled with rejoicing, singing and dancing. Muslim religious services will be held on Fridays and followers will celebrate different holidays. (For more information see below and Appendix F “Cultural Tip Sheet for YES Students”)

For families hosting Muslim students, there are other publications available to acquaint your family with the prayer and dietary needs, as well as clothing and cultural behaviors to which a Muslim student may be accustomed, the role of fasting and the importance of the mosque (see Appendix B for a list of additional readings).

In Appendix A you will find an activity to share with your participant to help increase your respective levels of understanding about each other’s religion in the U.S. and Ghanaian cultures. If you are not religious, you can easily adapt the activity to one that will help you learn more about your participant’s religion.

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The principal parties who were responsible for its development were volunteers with AFS Intercultural Programs, Inc., Alan Russell and Kathleen Zamboni.

Alan Russell first became a part of the AFS family as a host brother more than 40 years ago. Later he became a sending father when his daughter was an AFS student to Norway. He has been an AFS volunteer for eight years. He has served in various capacities including Chapter Coordinator, Area Team Sending Coordinator, Local Support Coordinator, Wiki Policy and Procedures Committee, Transatlantic Orientation Exchange, Hosting Orientation Workgroup, Flight Chaperon. He was a member of the team which developed the handbooks for US families hosting student from Germany and Austria. He and his wife have hosted several students, including one from Ghana.

Professionally, Alan worked for over 35 years in the IT field, retiring from the position of Account Manager in a Fortune 500 company where he coordinated the IT projects in their international subsidiaries. In that capacity he had extensive international travel. He also was an adjunct instructor in Computer Science for 25 years. He has been listed in many Who's Who publications including Who's Who in Education. In addition to his AFS work, he currently volunteers as the Director of Admissions and International Student Coordinator for a Christian high school.

Kathleen Zamboni first became involved as an AFS volunteer more than 18 years ago when her daughter was an AFS exchange student to Italy. Of all of her AFS volunteer positions Kathleen's favorite has been to escort for AFS students to Panama (flight chaperon) and Spain (Program Leader). Additionally Kathleen has served as a liaison, an emergency family, End of Stay bus chaperon, host family interviewer, interpreter for Spanish-speaking hosted students, the Area Team Arrival Orientation Coordinator, and Area Team Orientations Co-Coordinator. Her area of special interest is creating culture lessons and materials for host family and student orientations. For the past three years Kathleen has been the YES Cluster Coordinator (six students annually including one each year from Ghana) for the North West California Area Team.

Professionally, Kathleen is a certified Public Health Nurse, credentialed School Nurse and certified Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). In addition to local community service, including founding and directing an international adoption agency Kathleen, along with her husband, has been an active health care volunteer to Mexico, Central and South America since 1976. In 2002 Kathleen spent three months in Kumasi, Ghana, at the Regional Health Center as a technical assistance for the CDC/WHO STOP (Stop Transmission of Polio) Program. She has traveled extensively to more than 30 countries in Africa, India, Europe, and Latin America.

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AFS-USA maintains this handbook on behalf of its YES consortium partners including ACES, AIFS Foundation, CIEE and PAX

Cover pictures courtesy of Rodney Tigaa and the Torgerson Family, Maureen Bansah and the Sarabia Family cousins Sasha Cohn and Malia Emmanuel, Prosper Achulo and the Savage – Hino Family, and Freda Agyemeng and the Bailey-Walker Family.

Appendix A

Religion

This supplement on religion is intended to provide you with some guidelines and caveats.

A two-way sharing of perspectives (but without proselytizing) is an effective way to promote understanding and world peace starting at the most basic level—individual and family. Within your family and your Ghanaian student there are many possible religions that could be represented including Islam, Christianity (and its many variations), Judaism, Buddhism, Eckankar and traditional animistic beliefs.

Getting started:

When your Ghanaian student arrives in your home he/she will already have experienced a very long flight across several time zones, as well as one to two Arrival Orientations. Prayer time may be imminent and Sabbath and/or an important religious holy day may be only a day or two away.

One of your first acts of welcoming him/her will be to talk with your student about his/her immediate religious/spiritual needs. You will want to clarify what he or she needs to feel comfortable while keeping in mind that, for many people, their spiritual beliefs and religious rituals provide reassurance and emotional support. One goal of this inquiry is to gather enough information from your student to formulate a clear and concise plan of action for meeting your student's needs.

- If your student would like to pray – help your student to find a quiet, suitable place in your home. Also see discussion in YES Cultural Handbook and the YES Host Family Handbook.
- If your student would like to observe a religious holy day – see appendix F and discussion in YES Cultural Handbook.
- If your student would like to attend religious services (especially if his/her religion is different than yours):
 - Investigate what is available locally and share this information with your student.
 - He/she will want to know the day, the time, the length of the service, appropriate clothing, behavior, what to bring and whether or not student may eat before attending, etc.
 - Some of this investigation could be done ahead of time especially for those students who have declared on their application that they “regularly practice (religion)” and would like to attend weekly services.
 - Contact a representative or the religious leader ahead of time to learn this person's title and name and to provide him/her with enough information so that they are able to offer your student a warm welcome and to help him/her to feel comfortable.
 - Determine how student will get to the place of worship and the exact location of entrance:
 - Who will drive him/her to and from?
 - Who will introduce him/her to the religious leader?
 - Will someone from your family stay with your student? If so, who will it be?

- Write up your agreed-upon plan and give a copy to your student or post it where the whole family can see. Your plan might look something like this:

SALA'S PLAN FOR PRAYERS/MOSQUE

- Friday afternoon, August 29, Public Library Meeting Center
- Bring: prayer rug, Koran, etc.
- Arrange to leave school at 2:30 pm
- Service starts at 3:00 pm
- Host mom (Susie) will pick up Sala at school in front of the multi-purpose room , drive her to the Center and introduce her to the Imam
- Service ends about 5:30 am
- Host mom (Susie) will pick up Sala at 5:30 am—Sala should wait by the front door until Susie comes!
- Susie's cell phone number is XXX

SALA'S PLAN FOR CHURCH

- Sunday morning, First Community Church of Our City
- Plan to leave the house at 9:30 am
- Service starts at 10:00 am
- Host dad (George) will drive Sala and introduce her to the minister
- Service ends about 11:30 am
- Host mom (Susie) will pick up Sala at 11:30 am—wait by the front door until Susie comes!
- Susie's cell phone number is XXX

Agree to re-visit and evaluate this plan together before the next religious service and then again several weeks and months later. Decide together if the current plan is satisfactory for everyone involved. Is it working? Are all of us happy? Are all of us agreeable to continuing with this plan or are there some changes that we would like to make?

Some points to keep in mind:

Your actions and attitudes will go a long way toward assuring your student that he/she is in a safe environment:

- Taking time to clarify and work through topics
- Respect
- Interest and openness to all topics and inquiries
- Flexibility
- Willingness to make accommodations
- Caring
- Tolerance

You are parenting and guiding a teenager who may be away from his/her familiar surroundings, home and the emotional support of his/her family for the very first time and who, most likely, will not be accustomed to making decisions alone. As a teen this may be his/her first opportunity to test, explore, and/or challenge religious values. Sometimes exchange students decide before arrival that they will continue the same religious practices as at home. Sometimes a student decides ahead of time that he will not practice his/her religion during his/her exchange year.

Sometimes a student has decided one way and then changes his/her mind early on or perhaps even later in the year. Sometimes a student hasn't even thought ahead of time about what he/she will do and now finds himself/herself floundering and unsure.

The range of perspectives regarding religion and religious beliefs and practices is extensive, even more so when two different cultures are represented. As you all get to know each other it will be appropriate to create time for discussion and sharing of your own family's religious or beliefs or moral philosophies. Together you can explore similarities and differences and perhaps visit each other's place of worship or participate in one another's prayers or church/mosque activities or customs. This sharing and exploration need not be a one-time event, but can be on-going during the year as your student-host family relationship develops and as your student is exposed to more "American life" experiences.

Goals of Discussion:

We hope that by engaging in this on-going dialogue about religion that host family members and students alike will be able to:

- Use the correct vocabulary when speaking of the other's religion (demonstration of respect);
- Clearly state the host family's expectations regarding their Ghanaian student's participation/non-participation in the host family's religious observances;
- Clearly state the religious needs of the Ghanaian student, as well as any expectations for the host family to participate with the student;
- Gain increased understanding respect and tolerance for religious differences (including positions of non-practicing and non-believers).

Suggested topics for the initial discussion can be found in the table on the following page.

Topic	Similar	Different	Notes
Name of religion?			
Term used to describe person following this religion?			
Describe a regular (non-special occasion) religious service: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day of the week • Time of it begins/ends? • Order of service (prayers/singing) • Appropriate behaviors during service • Who attends (families, adults, men, women, children) • Seating arrangement/order 			
What would one be expected to bring along to the religious service (Bible, Torah, Prayer rug)?			
If one exists, what is the term used to name your religion's holy scriptures?			
Term used for the name of the place where service is held?			
Are there other occasions for worship - special holy days or festivals?			
Term for religious leader in the highest position?			
Other roles that religion plays in your life?			
Fundamental beliefs re: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual teachings • Afterlife • Moral teachings • Concept of forgiveness/redemption • Concept of heaven 			
History of your religion?			
Name of founder?			

During subsequent discussions you may also wish to share additional information about your family's involvement in your religious community (if you are). Some topics could include:

- The religious expectations of your family and how you would expect your hosted participant to participate in them.
- What religious events does your family regularly participate in?
- How often do you participate in these events?
- Besides a structured worship service, what other types of activities take place at the religious events which you attend?
- What percentage of your family's close friends are ones with whom you also share religious experiences (e.g. attend the same church / Bible study / etc.)?
- If you have teenage children, do they attend youth group, etc?
- What percentage of your children's close friends are ones with whom they share this experience?
- How many of the students who attend your church's youth group are also ones from the school your hosted student will be attending?
- What types of activities take place at these youth group meetings?

All of these things may be important to you, but some are generally more important in one culture than another. Ask your participant how he or she would respond if the situation were reversed (you were an exchange participant in his/her home). Discuss your responses together.

Take it a step further by asking other people whom you view as somewhat culturally different from you how they would respond and discuss your responses together. Remember, culture is not just determined by geography, it is also determined by factors such as age group, ethnicity, gender, shared context, level of ability. etc. (See the Introduction of this Handbook 8 for more information.)

Communication

What do you want to achieve when you communicate with someone else?

Rank each of the communication goals listed below in order of their importance to you.

- Convey information
- Show how you feel about the relationship
- Create a good impression
- Convey respect for the other person
- Reach agreement
- Maintain harmony
- Make the other person feel happy
- Maintain the other person's interest
- Make sure the other person is comfortable and not embarrassed by the conversation.

Why did you rank them in this order?

Record your answers here:

All of these things may be important to you, but some are generally more important in one culture than another. Ask your participant how he or she would respond and discuss your responses together.

Take it a step further by asking other people whom you view as somewhat culturally different from you how they would respond and discuss your responses together. Remember, culture is not just determined by geography, it is also determined by factors such as age group, ethnicity, gender, shared context, level of ability. etc. (Refer to pages 8 and 12 for more information.

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Appendix C – The Country of Ghana



Ghana is divided into ten regions which are further grouped into three zones (Northern Zone: Northern, Upper West and Upper East Regions; Middle Zone: Brong-Ahafo, Ashanti and Eastern Regions; Southern Zone: Volta, Greater Accra, Central and Western Regions). Students coming under the YES program come from one specific zone each year. The region that a student comes from is significant because each geographic region will vary in ethnicity, language, religion, and customs.

Note: AFS-Ghana selects students from the north in one year, the middle the next year, and the south the following year. Some students who are selected are quite young because they would be too old when the selections from that area would be made three years later.

(Below material from "Ghana." CIA - The World Factbook)

Background

Formed from the merger of the British colony of the Gold Coast and the Togoland trust territory, Ghana in 1957 became the first sub-Saharan country in colonial Africa to gain its independence. A long series of coups results in the suspension of the constitution in 1981 and a ban on political parties. A new constitution, restoring multiparty politics, was approved in 1992. Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings, head of state since 1981, won presidential elections in 1992 and 1996, but was constitutionally prevented from running for a third term in 2000. John Kufuor, who defeated Vice President Atta Mills in a free and fair election, succeeded him and was reelected in 2004. John Evans Atta Mills is current President.

Location: Western Africa, bordering the Gulf of Guinea, between Cote d'Ivoire and Togo. Also borders Burkina Faso to the north.

Area: *total:* 239,460 sq km *land:* 230,940 sq km *water:* 8,520 sq km

Area – comparative: slightly smaller than Oregon

Climate: tropical; warm and comparatively dry along southeast coast; hot and humid in southwest; hot and dry in north

Natural Resources: gold, timber, industrial diamonds, bauxite, manganese, fish, rubber, hydropower, petroleum, silver, salt, limestone

Land Use: *arable land:* 17.54% *permanent crops:* 9.22% *other:* 73.24% (2005)

Natural Hazards: dry, dusty, northeastern harmattan winds occur from January to March; droughts

Current Environmental Issues: recurrent drought in north severely affects agricultural activities; deforestation; overgrazing; soil erosion; poaching and habitat destruction threatens wildlife populations; water pollution; inadequate supplies of potable water

Geography: Lake Volta is the world's largest artificial lake

Population: 23,832,495 note: estimates for this country explicitly take into account the effects of excessive mortality due to AIDS; this can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality and death rates, lower population and growth rates, and changes in the distribution by age and sex than would otherwise be expected (July 2009 est.)

Life expectancy at Birth: *total population:* 59.857 years male, 58.98 years *female* 60.75 years (2009 est.)

Total Fertility Rate: 3.68 children born/woman (2006 est.)

Ethnic groups: black African 98.5% (major tribes – Akan 45%, Moshi-Dagbon 15%, Ewe 12%, Ga-Dangme 7%, Gurma 4%), European and other 1.5% (2000 census)

Languages: English (official), African languages (including Akan, Moshi-Dagbon, Ewe, and Ga)

Literacy: *definition:* age 15 and over can read and write *total population:* 57.9% male 66.4% female 49.8% (2000 census)

Economy of Ghana: Well endowed with natural resources, Ghana has roughly twice the per capita output of the poorest countries in West Africa. Even so, Ghana remains heavily dependent on international financial and technical assistance. Gold and cocoa production and individual remittances are major sources of foreign exchange. The domestic economy continues to revolve around agriculture, which accounts for about 35% of GDP and employs about 55% of the work force, mainly small landholders. Ghana signed a Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact in 2006, which aims to assist in transforming Ghana's agricultural sector. Ghana opted for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) program in 2002, and is also benefiting from the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative that took effect in 2006. Thematic priorities under its current Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy, which also provides the framework for development partner assistance, are: macroeconomic stability; private sector competitiveness; human resource development; and good governance and civic responsibility. Sound macro-economic management along with high prices for gold and cocoa helped sustain GDP growth in 2008.

Cultural Diversity: Ghana has over fifty ethnic groups spread over her ten regions. The various Ghanaian Ethnic Groups speak over ninety languages and dialects. In spite of the ethnic diversity, Ghanaians see themselves as one people with a common destiny.

Governance: Ghana has a democratically elected presidential system of governance based on universal adult suffrage. Ghana is a very safe country, stable and has a very low crime rate.

Religious Diversity: Ghanaians by nature are very religious, whether they are Muslims or Christians. There are three main religious groups: Christianity Islam, and African Traditional Religion. Practitioners of these religions have a high level of tolerance for each other. 68.8% are Christians, 15.9% are Muslims, 8.5% practice African Traditional Religion, 0.7% practice other religions and 6.1% have no religious affiliation.

Islam in Ghana: The spread of Islam into West Africa, beginning with ancient Ghana in the ninth century, was mainly the result of the commercial activities of North African Muslims. The empires of both Mali and Songhai that followed ancient Ghana in the Western Sudan adopted the religion. Islam made its entry into the northern territories of modern Ghana around the fifteenth century. Mande (or as they're known in Ghana "Wangara") traders and clerics carried the religion into the area. The northeastern sector of the country was influenced by Muslims who escaped the Hausa jihads of northern Nigeria in the nineteenth century.

Most Ghanaian Muslims are Sunni, following the Maliki version of Islamic law. Sufism, involving the organization of mystical brotherhoods (tariqa) for the purification and spread of Islam, is not widespread in Ghana. The Tajaniyah and the Qadiriya brotherhoods, however, are represented. The Ahmadiyya, a sect originating in nineteenth-century India, is the only non-Sunni sect present in the country.

Despite the spread of Islamism in the Middle East, North Africa, and even in Nigeria since the mid-1970's, Ghanaian Muslims and Christians have had excellent relations. Guided by the authority of the Muslim Representative Council, religious, social, and economic matters affecting Muslims have often been redressed through negotiations. The Muslim Council has also been responsible for arranging pilgrims to Mecca for believers who can afford the journey. In spite of these achievements, the council has not succeeded in taking initiatives for the upgrading of

Islamic schools beyond the provision of basic Qur'anic instruction. This may explain the economic and technological gap between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Ghanaian Ahmadiyyah Movement, which has established a number of vocational training centers, hospitals, and some secondary schools, is an exception.

Educational System: The system comprises two years of nursery, one or two years of kindergarten followed by primary school of six years (i.e. from class one to class six). This is then followed by six years of secondary school comprising of three years of junior secondary and three years of senior secondary or technical school.

One can then go to the university, the polytechnic, or the training college depending on one's particular area of interest or chosen career.

There are four core subjects that are compulsory to all students in the senior secondary schools. These are English language, mathematics, integrated science, and social studies. In addition, students can choose a combination of other subjects from a group of academic programs which are listed below:

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS	BREAKDOWN/SUBJECTS
GENERAL ARTS	A combination of three or four of the following courses: Literature in English, Religious Studies, French/Ghanaian Language, History, Geography, Elective Mathematics, Government.
GENERAL SCIENCE	A combination of three or four of the following courses: Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Geography, Biology.
AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE	Crop and Animal Science, Biology, Chemistry and Physics.
HOME ECONOMICS	A combination of three or four of the following courses: Management in Living, General Knowledge in Art, Clothing and Textiles, Food and Nutrition.
VISUAL ARTS	A combination of three or four of the following courses: General Knowledge in Art, Textiles, Graphic Designing, Picture Making, Photography.
BUSINESS	A combination of three or four of the following courses: Accounting, Costing, Business Management, Typing, French.

School Uniform: All public primary and junior secondary school have government prescribed uniforms. However, private schools in the same category have their own designed uniform varying from one school to another. All senior secondary schools, private or public, have their own prescribed school uniform. In most schools the boys wear short-sleeved shirts and a pair of shorts, and the girls wear calf-length dresses or skirt and blouse.

Appendix D – Further Information on Dogs

1. Proverbs reflecting U.S. American values about dogs, animals, and pets:
 - a. “A dog is a man's best friend”
 - b. “They treat him like a dog”
 - c. “There is more than one way to skin a cat”
2. Info from “An Introduction to the Practice of Islam,” Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat, Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation:

“There are a lot of misunderstandings about the issue of “Dogs” in Islam. The dog itself is mentioned in the Qur’an as a loyal and honest companion and mentions the miraculous story of the young Christians in the early era of persecution. They ran and hid in a cave with their dog, slept for 309 years and woke up again....”

“The dog, in most of the Muslim communities, is acquired for the purposes of protection as a watch dog or for special use with hunters or police. They are not commonly seen as domestic pets, while cats, birds and other pets are quite common. Religiously, the dog is not to be in the house for the simple fact that the saliva is considered unclean “Najis” and should not touch any piece of cloth or part of the body. If that happens, it becomes unclean and needs to be washed thoroughly and in some sayings of the prophet, (7 times—one of the seven by dust).

To shed some light on that issue, it’s helpful if you realize that at the time of the prophet in the desert of Arabia, dogs did not have the attention and care of the modern veterinarians today in Europe and America. Dogs, in some instances, bite and may have “rabies,” which could be dangerous and possibly deadly. Despite the fact that shots are becoming more available today, dogs are still not used as domestic pets in Muslim societies. That explains why many cultural exchange students are very uncomfortable with or scared of dogs in the house. Students might request that the dog not be permitted to enter their rooms where they pray. By the time the student prepares to return home, their comfort level and perception of the dog changes.”

Appendix E – More Ghanaian Proverbs and Symbols

“We should not try to eat the chicken before it is cooked” (patience)

“An empty sack will not stand upright” (character)

“A tree does not disapprove of itself because one of its branches is cut off” (character)

“If you walk behind an elephant you will not get drenched with dew” (experience)

“If your pocket is empty ask your hand why” (hard work)

“The most reliable person you can send on an errand is yourself”

“A poor dancer always blames the drums”

“At the tribunal of foxes, the chickens are always guilty”

Also see:

<<http://www.worldofquotes.com/proverb/Ghanaian/1/index.html>>

Symbols:

Besides the symbols which appear in the body of the handbook, you may find others and additional information on the following websites:

<<http://calltoactionquilt.org/africansymbols.html>>

<<http://www.adinkra.org>>

<www.adinkra.org/htmls/adinkra_index.htm>

Appendix F – YES Cultural Tips Sheet

CULTURAL TIP SHEET FOR YES STUDENTS

The information presented below is a general guide to understanding some of the cultural roots of behaviours that may be displayed by students from YES countries. This information speaks only to overall trends and will not hold true in all circumstances, especially since the cultures represented in YES are so varied. This guide will hopefully be helpful in attempting to understand the underlying causes of some misunderstandings and provide a point of departure for starting a conversation, when issues arise.

TOPIC	CULTURAL INFORMATION	POSSIBLE SUPPORT ISSUES	SUPPORT ADVICE
RELIGION	Even though many YES students come from countries that have large or majority Muslim populations, there are other students who are Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Jewish, etc. Some students are very devout and religiously observant while others are not practicing. (Please also refer to the YES cultural handbook on differences regarding religious practices and following of religious rules which may differ greatly from country to country).	Diet: Practicing Muslims are not allowed to eat pork or consume alcohol; Hindus do not eat beef; many Hindus are vegetarians In many religions, meat has to be prepared in a certain way prescribed by the religion (Halal foods/ Kosher foods)	Diet: Be mindful of dietary needs; discuss and look up ingredients in dishes; if a student does eat something forbidden, it is ok, but may need to stop once the mistake is discovered. Some host families choose to avoid eating the type of food that is forbidden; some offer different kinds of foods so that their host son or daughter can avoid the forbidden foods, while enjoying many of the same dishes his or her host family does.
	The month of Ramadan is a time during which many Muslims fast from sun up to sun set (no food or drink). This special month is based on a lunar calendar and therefore does not correspond exactly with the solar, Gregorian calendar. This year, Ramadan took place from Oct 4 to Nov 3 2005.	Fasting during Ramada for Muslims may mean that they do not participate in sports or feel left out during family meal times; swimming can be an issue; if participating in sports, not drinking water may be an issue	Fasting is common in a number of religions in some form. Some families choose to participate in fasting with their students as a way of experiencing a new cultural through their hosting. students may be excused from participating in sports during Ramadan
	Prayer is an important aspect of	While the prayers typically take no more	Praying does not have to be done in a mosque or temple;

	<p>the religious life of practicing Muslims, who will generally pray five times each day, at specific times, which are religiously-dictated.</p> <p>Many religions require specific levels of modesty in dress or specific types of dress. In the case of Islam, there is a wide array of interpretation of "modest dress" but many observant Muslims feel that head covering for women is essential and many would include the covering of legs and arms for both men and women as essential elements of modesty in dress. Again, there is a widely varying interpretation among the religiously observant Muslims about what is required.</p> <p>In Islam, the saliva of dogs is to be avoided, as it is seen as unclean.</p>	<p>than several minutes, finding a quiet and clean place for prayer can sometimes prove challenging, especially the noon prayer, which takes place during the school day.</p> <p>Ablutions: practice of religious cleansing (basically, of the face, hands and feet) before prayer can result in wet floors</p> <p>Some people not used to seeing women who cover their hair, will find the practice awkward. The head cover will not stop a student from participating in normal family and school life (with the exception maybe of joining a coed swimming team in some cases). Some students who wear the head covering might feel somewhat rejected by their peers in their schools because the head covering is unusual to see in most U.S. high schools.</p> <p>Students may be afraid or reluctant to live with dogs Many religiously observant students would strongly prefer not to touch dogs. Some may not realize themselves that the prohibition is actually against the saliva of the dog and would not necessarily preclude them</p>	<p>a private space can be provided; it is helpful to find out the direction Mecca is and not to disturb the student while praying. Many schools allow the students to use a corner of a room designated for "study hall" or a school counsellor's office.</p> <p>Since wet floors in a bathroom may be seen as quite OK in the context many students are coming from, explanation of expectations regarding dry floors and using towels to soak up any water left on the floor would help them meet expectations in the host family's home. Stepping inside the bathtub, rather than using the sink for the ablutions can help a lot.</p> <p>Students who use head covering make the decision to wear a veil on their own and will not view it as subservient (as is often interpreted in the West). They see the head covering as an essential element of their religious observance and are not embarrassed by. A frank and open conversation about their religion and the part the head covering plays in their observance can help to demystify it and even lead to some good discussions about what "modest" dress may mean to different communities.</p> <p>Keep the dog out of the student's room and don't expect the student to pet the dog; this does not mean the student cannot live with a dog; many students come to like their host family's dog and overcome that fear.</p>
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		<p>from, walking the dog for example. However, it is the case that the religious root of the aversion to dogs is also compounded by the very practical consideration in many countries from which the YES students hail, that a great number of dogs are, in fact, dangerous because they are generally used as guard dogs or are strays prone to biting.</p> <p>Going to church or mosques/ participating in host family's religious services</p>	<p>Students can participate in religious services of host family; there is nothing wrong with attending a different religious service; however, host families should not force a student to attend church if they feel uncomfortable doing so.</p>
SOCIAL LIFE AND GENDER ROLES	<p>Many students come from more hierarchical societies where respect of elders is stressed and fathers may be dominant. They may also be used to segregation of males and females. These societies stress dependence on others and doing many things as a group, not as individuals. People are very socially minded and often have social gatherings. Relationships are extremely important and saving face is a major concern. People can be very spontaneous and live in the here and now.</p>	<p>Students may not be used to being independent and doing things on their own. Female dominance may be difficult for them. Touching of members of the opposite sex may be considered inappropriate whereas touching of same sex friends may not be an issue. Public appearances can be extremely important and there is a difference in public vs. private behaviours. Strong reliance on friends and families may result in what could be considered excessive communication with family and friends. Spontaneity can be interpreted as lack of planning or not being on schedule.</p>	<p>Understanding of these differences as well as an explanation of these differences are a first step. Modelling by elders or advice from friends could be very helpful. Giving students time to adjust and be mindful of differences in touching and space differences is helpful. Knowing that reliance on friends and family is very important and gaining trust is a prerequisite for building a relationship. It is important to know that relationship building may be slower than in the US. It is based on helping each other and sharing secrets, not on doing activities together. By helping someone and doing things for them, you show that you care for them.</p>
COMMUNICATION STYLES	<p>Students are generally used to more indirect communication styles. That means they will not directly state what they think but will expect the listener to decipher the message and to find out what they really mean.</p>	<p>The indirect way of communicating and not directly stating what they really need, think, or want can lead to many misunderstandings - from confusion to a perception that the student is "lying" or "manipulative". For example, a student will find it more acceptable to give vague</p>	<p>Know that what students say may not be what they really mean. It takes time to get to know the student and to build a trusting relationship. If the student thinks that you do not care for him or her by doing things for them, they may shut down and not be willing to do anything. They will say yes but have no intention of doing things because that is what they think you</p>

	<p>Students rely on the context and on nonverbals to convey a message. It is also important to tell the listener what they think the listener wants to hear, and not to offend people, especially when they are in higher positions, so they can save face. It is also polite to refuse things that are offered (food, for example) with the expectation that it will need to be offered several times before they can accept. Likewise, when told "no", they may argue/ask repeatedly after being told "no", since this is what they think will bring the expected result. Repetition is very acceptable.</p>	<p>answers or make excuses instead of saying "no". They will also avoid direct confrontation at all cost and prefer to work through third parties who can mediate for them. Another tendency may be to exaggerate things, for several people to talk at the same time, or to get very loud and excited when they feel strongly about something (some Arab cultures). Other cultures may be very quiet (Asians, for example); for them it is important to be modest and respectful; this could be shown by not looking people directly in the eye and by speaking in a very low and soft voice.</p>	<p>want to hear.</p> <p>Silence may not mean that they agree; in fact it may mean that they should not object and shows that they do not agree (again, being respectful). Open ended questions such as "why did you do this?" are not productive; instead, closed statements followed by some silence may be better in getting students to open up (for example, "thismust have been very difficult for you", showing the student that you feel for them, understand them, and want to help them.</p> <p>When the need for confrontation arises, know that this makes them very uncomfortable and maybe use the help of someone else as intermediary (maybe a teacher or religious person). It helps to use stories or accounts of personal or other people's experiences to get a point across (could be fictitious, too) without mentioning people by name to avoid embarrassment.</p>
<p>HOUSEHOLD RULES AND FAMILY LIFE</p>	<p>Many students could be used to male dominance in their families. It could be that they did not have a lot of independence (may be more the case for females than males) and had a lot of very direct guidance from their parents. They may not be used to the concept of getting an allowance and may have no practice in spending money, either not wanting to spend any or spending too much. Household chores may not be something they are used to, especially males. Objects or personal things may be considered as belonging not to one individual, but to everyone in the family because it is one unit.</p>	<p>Families may find the students passive or needing too much guidance, direction, and/or attention. They may be perceived as lazy if they have to be constantly reminded to pick up after themselves or keep things clean. They could also be seen as immature. Some males may not be following instructions from females or feel uncomfortable in a female dominated household. Some communication practices may be perceived as "badgering", not listening, or not following instructions. Using other people's property could be an issue (stealing vs. sharing). Students could be expecting to be treated as guests at the beginning.</p>	<p>It may be advisable to enlist the help of a same sex person in advising the students. Doing things as a family and spending time together would be a good idea as well as giving a lot of direction and guidance at the beginning and slowly making changes. Taking the student to other families where behaviour patterns can be observed is also helpful. Of course, another good way to experience different family styles is by spending time with friends and their families.</p>

TIME AND SPACE	<p>Time is not as scheduled and more fluid in most of the YES countries. It is not as important to be on time. It may also not be common to plan things that will happen in the future.</p> <p>Personal space may not be as important and people could stand a lot closer during conversations.</p>	<p>Some students could be late or oversleep. They may want to stay up late. They may not be on time at school or for certain events the family is planning on. They may change their minds on whether or not they would like to do something or not openly state what they would like to do.</p> <p>Being physically close may make some people uncomfortable.</p>	<p>Students may need some time to adjust to a very time-oriented US culture where it is important to schedule events ahead of time and to be on time. They may need some additional help in getting up or getting ready for events.</p> <p>Will need to have an explanation on space differences and how people feel about it in different countries.</p>
SCHOOL	<p>School and studying may vary also. In some countries, there is a lot of homework and students are expected to work on their own when at home. In some other countries, studying may be done at school and not at home. There may be more group activities or very little discussion. Testing is different (multiple choice and open book tests may be uncommon). Writing styles, learning styles, teacher/student interaction are most likely completely different.</p>	<p>Students may have a difficult time adjusting to school and different expectations from teachers and host families. Students who do little homework or little independent work after school in their own countries may be struggling in school. Due to the idea of saving face and indirect communication styles, they may state they have done their homework and school is going well when in fact it is not. Teachers who have not had experiences with people from other cultures could be misinterpreting behaviours and ways of approaching homework and classroom interaction. In Asian cultures it is not expected to criticize or disagree with what the teacher is saying; they may be very quiet in class. In other countries, the classroom may be very loud and students work a lot in groups.</p>	<p>It is definitely a good idea to contact the school and the teachers early and get progress reports. It may be a good idea to monitor homework and to provide help (or enlist help), especially in the beginning. Get grade reports early and do not assume that the student's reports on school work are accurate. Get the teachers emails and check on progress regularly before there are any issues. Conversely, if a student studies all the time, encourage them to go out and spend time with friends. Working with friends on school work is also a good idea instead of not doing any homework. It is ok to help each other out but not to do the work for them or to copy from others. Certain subjects in school such as US history or literature may need to be taken later on in the school year. After hour school clubs could help in making friends at the school and enlisting help with homework.</p> <p>Any issues regarding school should be reported to the volunteers early on, so help can be set up before there are any problems.</p>



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