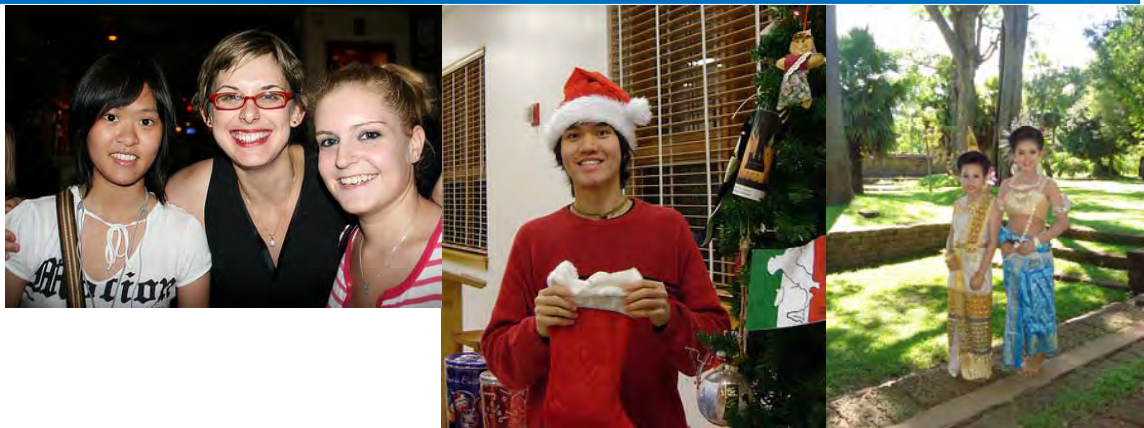




Handbook for U.S. Host Families of Thai Participants



June 2010

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Foreword

Thank you for volunteering to welcome a young student from Thailand 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 U.S. Host Families of Thai Participants is dedicated to 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 Thai 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 Thai **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 Thai school systems
- Predominant communication styles in the U.S. and Thailand
- The general Thai and U.S. views on concepts such as time, space and privacy
- Thai family structure and rules
- Thai cultural norms regarding personal appearance, religion and other aspects

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, 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 Thai student in a journey of self and cultural discovery.

Thai Culture Quiz

Perhaps you already know a lot about Thai culture. Or maybe you only know a little. In either case, you may find the following questions interesting. After you have answered these questions, 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 – Thai people eat rice at every meal.
2. T/F – Thai customs dictate that you do not wash all of your clothes together, but rather keep socks and underwear separate.
3. T/F – It is very important to Thai family members that they discuss everything with each other and try to resolve individual differences or differences of opinion about a broad range of topics, including politics.
4. T/F – Thai people are generally fun loving and have a good sense of humor.
5. T/F – Food is eaten with chopsticks in Thailand.
6. T/F – Thai culture tends to help people focus on the common good.
7. T/F – Male students in Thailand do not wear pink.
8. T/F – Thai students are often focused on getting good grades.
9. T/F – Thai students engage in debate and classroom discussions where people express their own opinions.
10. T/F – Thai students tend to appear emotional.
11. T/F – Children are served and start eating first at Thai family meals.
12. T/F – A Thai student who slumps his shoulders, lowers his head and looks down while being corrected is listening politely and being respectful.

Answers to Thai Culture Quiz

1. Thai people eat rice at every meal.

TRUE –Rice is the staple of the Thai diet. Food is only considered a meal when it includes rice. Increasingly Thais who live in urban areas have broadened their diets. Noodles or Japanese food may be eaten as a snack. Bread is not generally chosen. (See section on Thai Food)

2. Thai customs dictate that you do not wash all of your clothes together, but rather wash socks and underwear separate from other clothing.

TRUE – This practice is rooted in Buddhism, a religion which 94.6% of Thais practice. Buddhism views the head as reverent and the feet as unclean, so underwear and socks are kept separate from other items. (See section on Religion)

3. It is very important to Thai family members that they discuss everything with each other and try to resolve individual differences of opinion about a broad range of topics, including politics.

FALSE – Thai families usually do not discuss problems or make decisions as a family. U.S. families are much more likely to have family “meetings” and have children openly oppose a parent’s decision. Thai children’s honor of parents and teachers means that even if the child disagrees, the Thai child will defer to the parent or the elder. (See section on Communication)

4. Thai people are generally fun loving and have a good sense of humor.

TRUE – The Thai culture promotes enjoyment of nearly all situations. People like to joke and play games with each other. (See section on Communication)

5. Food is eaten with chopsticks in Thailand.

False – Food is eaten with a spoon and fork. Noodles may be eaten with chopsticks. (See section on Thai Food)

6. Thai culture tends to help people focus on the common good.

TRUE – The Thai’s cultural framework incorporates elements of Buddhism, which create a mind-set that requires people not to offend anyone. As a result, Thais want harmony and cooperation before dissent or criticism. (See section on Religion)

7. Male students in Thailand do not wear pink.

False – Pink clothing is a normal color for both males and females. Pink is one of the King’s colors. Different days of the week are represented by different colors. On Tuesdays many people, including government workers, wear pink. (See section on Color Days)

8. Thai students are often focused on getting good grades.

True – In order to get into the best schools, in Thailand students generally attend extra academic classes after school to prepare for entrance exams to both high school and college. (See section on Schools)

9. Thai students engage in debate and classroom discussions where people express their own opinions.

False – Thai students are discouraged from questioning teachers in class so as not to show disrespect for the teacher. (See section on Communication)

10. Thai students tend to appear emotional.

False – Thai people generally do not show their feelings by displaying strong emotional reactions in public. This sometimes leads to misunderstandings of a Thai students likes and dislikes by U.S. host families who may openly display their own emotions. (See section on Conflict Resolution)

11. Children are served and start eating first at Thai family meals.

False – Thai children expect to wait for the eldest at the table to start eating before they should begin to eat. (See section on Thai Food)

12. A Thai student who slumps his shoulders, lowers his head and looks down while being corrected is listening politely and being respectful.

True – To show respect for authority, a Thai student being corrected will lower themselves and keep quiet. They are accustomed to listening politely and not responding verbally after being corrected. (See section on Eye Contact)

Introduction

What is Culture?

Intercultural experts 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

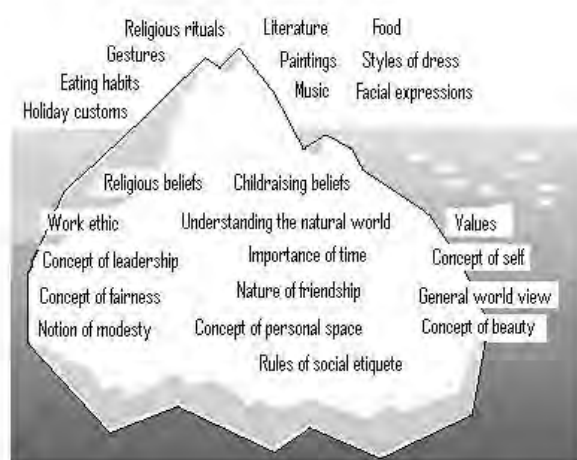


Culture is a set of behaviors, values, and beliefs created by groups of people, giving them a sense of community and purpose.

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**.



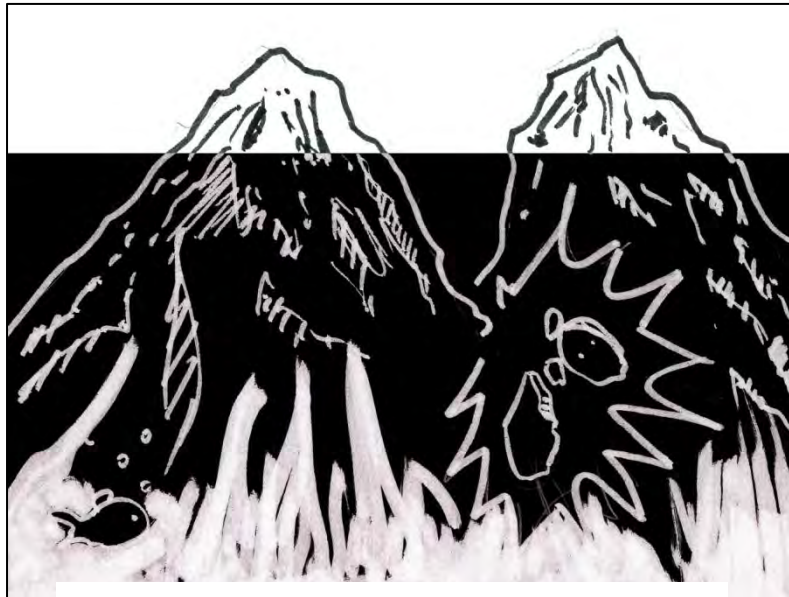
(<http://www.uop.edu/sis/culture/File/sec1-1-1h1.htm>)

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 Thai 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.

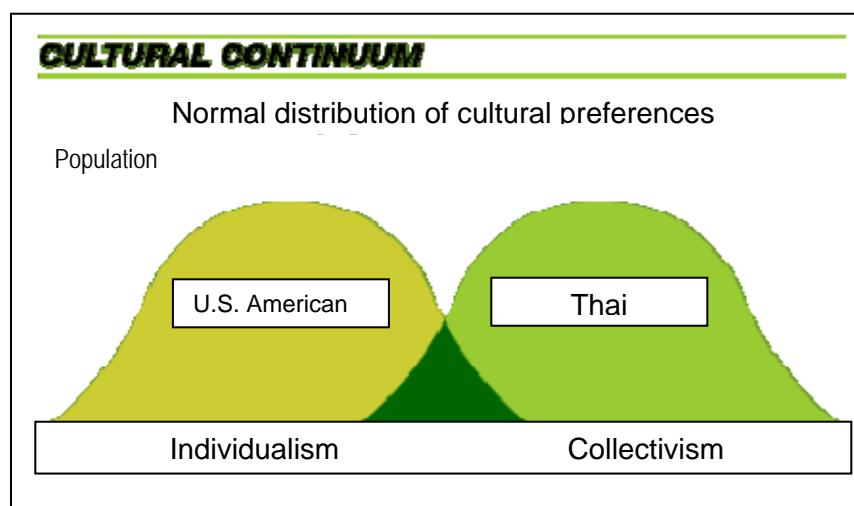
An example of a cultural generalization is the strongly held **U.S. American value of individualism**. U.S. Americans tend to like to do things themselves and see themselves as responsible for their own lives. This is reflected in popular expressions such as “pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps.” Even the Nike slogan, “Just Do It” suggests that we control our own destiny. But this doesn’t mean that all U.S. 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, U.S. **individualism** (emphasis on well-being of the individual) is displayed. On the right side is the Thai 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 one’s feelings. Maintaining harmony within

a group is very important in a collectivist culture. Family ties also tend to be stronger in collectivist cultures than those in individualist cultures. (See the section on Family)

The bell-shaped curves represent normal distributions of cultural preferences for Individualism or Collectivism. 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 U.S. Americans are much closer to the collectivist value. Conversely, collectivism is the norm in the Thai culture but some Thais can be found on the individualist side.

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

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. For this reason, we emphasize that **cultural generalizations should only be a starting point for exploration and discussion on how your cultural values may be similar or different than those of your participant.**

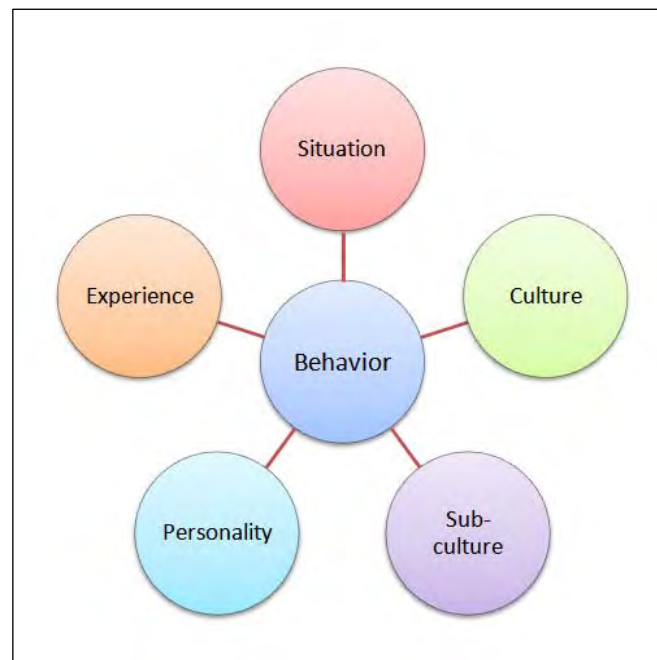
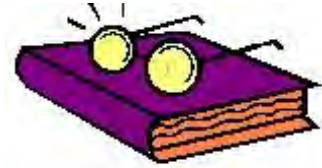


Figure 1
Factors that may influence behaviors

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 exchange student 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.



Imagine this scenario. A host family asks a newly-arrived Thai student if she wishes to join the summer soccer club to make friends and have an activity before school starts. The student says, “yes,” so the host family makes arrangements for fees, uniforms, shoes and transportation. After a few practices, the Thai girl says she feels sick and misses a practice. After the first game, she complains to another player that she has pulled a muscle. Without telling her host family or the coach, instead of going to practice the next week, she goes somewhere else. Later in the week the coach asks a host parent when the student will be healed enough to come to practice. The host parent is at first surprised that the student has not been attending practices, then angry at the Thai student that all the expenses have been paid and the arrangements for transportation made and the student is not following through on her commitment to play soccer.

What has created this conflict? The U.S. American host family value of individual choice lead them to expect that when their Thai student said, “yes,” when given the choice to play or not play soccer that she was expressing her desire to play soccer. The Thai student value of เกรงใจ “kreng jai,” “be considerate,” plus respect for her elders required her to reply with the answer she thought her host family wanted to hear. When the student did not enjoy soccer practice she did not want to offend her family or coach by telling them she did not want to go. Instead she said she was sick. When she still did not like playing soccer after the game, she did not want to disrespect her coach by telling her she would not play. She used indirect communication by telling another player she would not be playing by telling her she had pulled a muscle. The other student did tell this to the coach at practice when the Thai student was not in attendance. The Thai girl does not want to be disrespectful to her host parents by telling them she does not like the activity they suggested. She hopes they will understand when she does not go to practice that she does not wish to play soccer. The U.S. American host parents wonder why their student didn’t just tell them her preference or how things were going.

Communication

คิดก่อนพูด

Transliteration: kid-kon-pood

Literal: Think before speaking.

Greetings

In Thailand people do not normally say 'good morning', 'good afternoon', 'good evening' or 'good night'. They greet each other with the word *sawadee*, and instead of shaking hands, they put their palms together in a prayer-like gesture and bow slightly. This gesture is called a *wai*. It is customary for the younger or lower in status to begin the greeting. Most Thai students will usually wai to their natural parents (and grandparents in an extended family situation) before going to school and when coming back home. It is not necessary to return a *wai* to a child. Your Thai student will be unlikely to continue to wai while in the U.S. but may do so out of habit when first arriving.

Communication Styles

Direct and Indirect

In general, U.S. Americans consider themselves direct in their communication style. Compared to many cultures, such as those found in Asia, this is true.

A **direct** style of communication is one in which the meaning of what is said is found primarily in the words spoken.

In an **indirect** style of communication the meaning is more often derived from factors other than what is said, such as the sender's status relative to the receiver, the context of the situation, and body language. Thai people tend to be indirect in their communications.

Direct communication is like "reading the headlines" and indirect communication is like "reading between the lines." In indirect cultures, the message is often not found in what people say or do, but in what they fail to say or do.

The Thai students are not generally as vocal and blunt, they tend to answer what they think you want to hear, avoid conflict. Very polite.

U.S. Host Family



The differences were huge! Thai people believe that it is rude to ask questions. As a result we never knew if our student understood things or not, since she would never ask questions. We thought the purpose of [the exchange] was to share information by way of asking questions of each other. Obviously, that did not happen with our experience. It was VERY frustrating for our family. She also did not enter into any conversation around the table at dinner. Not sure if that was her culture or just the way she was brought up. The family discourse at dinner is key in America!

U.S. Host Family



Thai people often eat quietly and have discussions with family members after meals, perhaps while watching TV together. Your Thai student will need your family's help and encouragement to share their thoughts with you during meal time.

It will be very difficult for your Thai child to change from an indirect to a direct style of communication. It is going against everything that they have been taught. Thai children may also not be used to holding a back-and-forth conversations with adults, only with other children. Thai parents and teachers may act as mind-readers, anticipating a child's thoughts instead of asking a child to express his or her thoughts. It is really important for everything a Thai person says to be "kreng jai," "be considerate," to filter what is said so it will not be negative towards the other person. A Thai parent will tell her child "maybe" instead of "no" so as not to be too harsh when the parent does not want a child to do or get something.

Encourage your Thai child to join you while watching TV or in an activity to start interacting in a less direct way that may make them more comfortable. Do not ask open questions such as, "How was your day?" which may make it more difficult for your student to answer. Instead ask simpler, specific questions.

Individually approach a student several times if you have questions. He or she may not answer until he or she feels more comfortable with you.

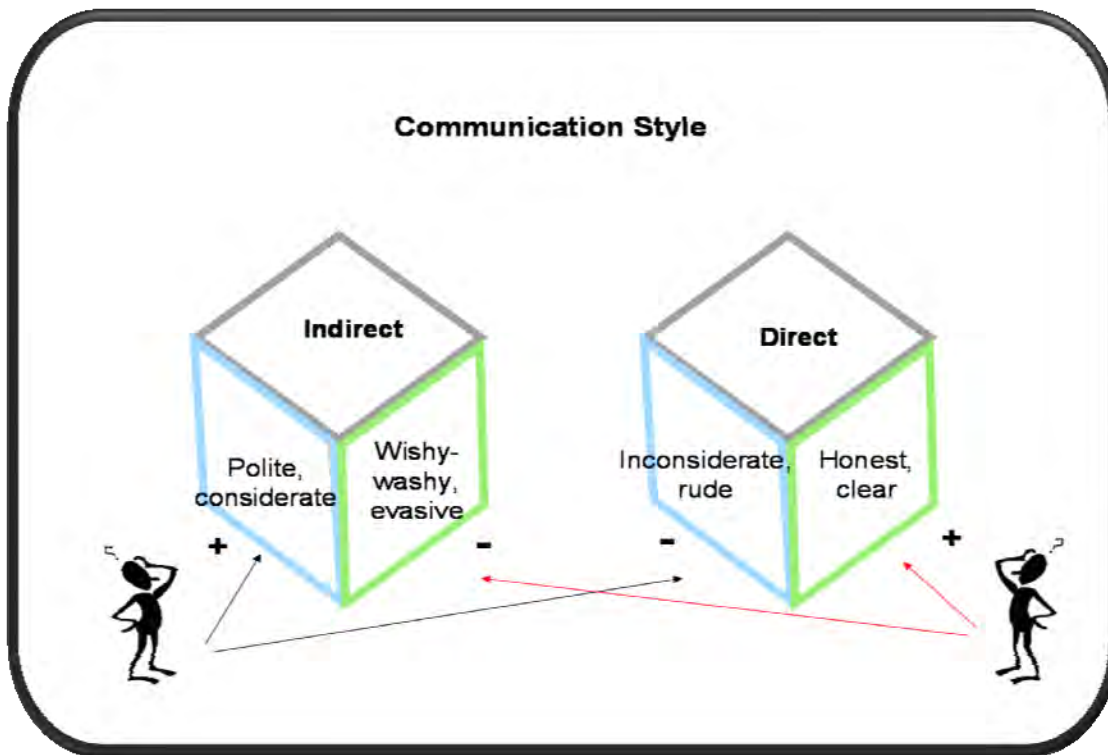
At first, ask simpler, specific questions beginning with *what*, *when* and *where* so students can provide short, direct answers.



Repeatedly encourage your student to share their opinion whether it is negative or positive. Reinforce with your Thai child that it is perfectly OK to say "I don't like brussel sprouts, rap music, the color mauve..."

While Thais have a good sense of humor, U.S. American jokes may be difficult for them to understand as they may not translate well into Thai. Be careful, especially at the beginning of your hosting experience, when telling jokes that are based on word meanings or pronunciations.

If you sense your participant is hesitant to share or has not shared with you an accurate representation of his or her feelings on a particular subject or decision, (for fear of hurting your feelings or displeasing you) asked a trusted third party such as a host sibling or your liaison to have an informal conversation about the same topic and compare notes.



The following is an example of a person with a direct style of communication talking with a person who has an indirect style:

Graphic Arts Teacher: Mae. What can I do for you?

Thai student: Excuse me. I need some help with this new machine.

Graphic Arts Teacher: Of course. Let me explain it again.

Thai student: I asked Mary, but she couldn't help me.

Graphic Arts Teacher: No, she hasn't tried it yet.

Thai Student: It's a little bit complicated.

Graphic Arts Teacher: It's very complicated, but after I explained it to you yesterday and asked you if you understood, you said yes.

THAI Student: Yes. Please excuse me.

Mae is trying to save the Graphic Arts teacher's face here. After all, if Mae says she doesn't understand the explanation, then the teacher might feel badly that he didn't give a very clear explanation, which the teacher might find embarrassing. Moreover, Mae expects that the teacher will understand that the "yes" could only be for politeness sake. At least this is how it would work in Mae's culture, where one has to be careful not to embarrass an expert. But in more direct cultures, "yes" has a tendency to mean "yes" (not "I'm being polite"), and no one is upset if another person doesn't understand the explanation.



When I asked our student what he would like to get from his American experience he hinted he would like to go to Disneyland after school was out. He then proceeded to save all his money for the trip and forego other adventures during the year. I felt very badly when he went home with all his savings because I didn't understand he was relying on me, his host parent, to make all the arrangements or let him know it

would not happen. I expected him to take more initiative by starting to make plans and keep asking me about it if he still really wanted to go.

U.S. Host Family



Thai's are also taught to “hint” at what they want and not to ask directly. If you think your student is hinting about something, ask them directly.

What Does “Yes” Actually Mean?

Many former host families have commented on the politeness and accepting attitude of their Thai students, but they have also expressed frustration over misunderstandings. Your questions to them are important tools for understanding each other, but a Thai student's answer of “yes” can have other meanings than approval of your request. The word for “yes” in Thai has at least 3 meanings, depending on the tone used.

U.S. Americans take the word “yes” to mean, “I will do it.” In an indirect culture “yes” can mean – I heard what you said; **not** that I agree with you, nor that I will do what you asked me to do, nor that I understand. It can mean only, “Yes, I heard you.”



Remind your Thai student that “yes means yes.” Explain to your student that by saying yes it means that they are in agreement. Discuss with your student the impact of saying “yes” when he/she really means “no.” Your Thai student will need help in saying “no.”



We would spend several minutes with the dictionary so he could understand the question – then he would give me a real answer.

U.S. Host Family



It is probably a good idea to have your Thai student restate the question or discussion to assure understanding. Have them tell you in their own words what you just talked about so you will know that you are both in agreement.

Mai Pen Rai

Mai Pen Rai means “never mind” (or more literally “it's nothing”). Symbolizing Thailand's unofficial national philosophy, these three little words help to calm the nation. *Mai Pen Rai* enables the Thai people to retain their composure, keep smiling and be happy in everything they do. Thai people care little about trifling things. If they are frustrated, instead of getting angry they simply say *Mai Pen Rai* and solve the problem by some other means. Thai people believe strongly in avoiding confrontation, but this doesn't mean that they don't care.

Showing Negative Emotions



Thailand is known as “Land of Smile” and Thai children are usually taught to have a smile on their face whether they are happy, sad, mad or confused. They are usually very adept at reading body language. If a host parent or student is showing they are upset, the Thai student may become very worried because they seldom see negative emotions expressed in Thailand. They may also think you are not happy with them.



If you are in a bad mood or upset for reasons unrelated to your student, reassure your student that you are not upset with him or her, but rather something that happened at work, etc. so he or she will begin to understand that U.S. Americans tend to show a large range of emotions, both positive and negative.

Volume and Tone of Voice

You may also find that your Thai student’s voice is very soft and that he or she pauses for long periods while talking with you. Thai children are raised to be polite at all times and in the Thai culture politeness is demonstrated by keeping one’s voice low and finding just the right words so as not to offend the other speaker.



She was very quiet. She did not initiate conversation. She nodded her head and said “yes” a lot, even though I don’t think she really understood or meant to say “yes!!!”

U.S. Host Family

People in Thailand people speak softly and are always aware of the tone of their words.



Initially, Thai students may need calm, quiet explanations of the range of volume and tones of voices they hear around them in different situations so they do not misinterpret people.



At first our Thai student thought a family member who was loud and direct was a mean person or did not like having her in the house.

U.S. Host Family

Eye Contact

In Thai culture eye contact is important, but it is more polite to look down to show respect. Direct eye contact between females and males can be considered as being too forward. To show the proper respect for authority in Thai society, a person enters the room of a boss or principal and keeps his or her head lower than the authority figure, even if it requires going down on one's knees to do so. A Thai student being corrected by a parent, teacher or principal will likely show he or she understands and defers by appearing small, lowering his or her eyes, and keeping quiet. He or she is not used to responding verbally in that situation.

The different expectations for eye contact can cause discomfort and misunderstanding between Americans and Thai students. In the United States, maintaining eye contact is important while having a conversation, particularly if it is a serious conversation. If you do not maintain eye contact, you give the person who you are talking to the feeling that you are not interested in what they are saying or that you are not being honest.



Encourage your student to look an elder in the eyes during a conversation and reinforce that doing so is a sign of respect for the elder. You, as the host family, may accept your Thai student not looking directly at you but other elders, such as a teacher, may misinterpret the lack of eye contact. Share this information with your student's teachers or your elder family members if you think this may be an issue.

Disagreements



Our student seemed...shocked when we had a disagreement with our children. She would never argue with her parents.

U.S. Host Family

It is impolite in Thai culture to openly disagree, especially a younger person disagreeing with an older person. Thais are tolerant of most forms of behavior and never ask others to understand Thai social customs, but these customs are extremely important to understanding why Thai never criticize each other openly. Losing your temper or shouting is never acceptable in Thailand, and your Thai student will be upset to observe such behavior in the home or at school.

It is also likely that the inability to disagree will spill over to unhappiness among siblings. Rational discussion is often perceived as the continuation of an argument.



We tried to get the point across that the U.S. has been built on disagreement, even with 'voices of authority...' The trick is to speak up respectfully.

U.S. Host Family



Help your student understand that having an opinion is valued in our culture and that discussions may seem confrontational when people are “just expressing themselves.”

Conflict Resolution

In Thailand religious tradition strongly influences conflict-resolution styles. Thai Buddhist emphasis on meditation and peaceful co-existence supports an indirect method of conflict resolution. Conflicting parties may appear to agree based on their peaceful exchange of positive affirmation, but they may continue to act in their own self-interest because, in fact, they may have yet to come to an agreement. Each may rely indirectly on a third party to deliver the message of their actual intent in a way that does not give offense.



Our Thai student was very relaxed and he did not have strong opinions regarding politics or religion. He was a Buddhist and practiced in a very low key way. We did not run into any “taboo” topics with him.

U.S. Host Family

Thai students tend to avoid conflict at all costs and will tell you they liked something they didn't like or they will say “yes” to an invitation that they don't want to accept and therefore do not attend. This can be very confusing for U.S. host family and school friends.

Problems are not addressed directly in Thai society and your Thai child will not be accustomed to a teacher, friend, host parent coming to them with an issue and “hitting the nail on the head.” The Thai child is familiar with a friend or teacher telling someone the problem and then the other person coming to them and delicately dancing around the issue until it is understood. The new generation, however, is beginning to adopt a more direct communication style.



To solve a problem with your student try giving positive suggestions or hints of what you would like to happen or how a task may best be done, as opposed to first telling him or her that he or she is doing it wrong.

Engage the help of a trusted third party, such as a host sibling or your liaison to help convey to the student how best to deal with a given situation.

Remember that you do not need to “teach a crocodile to swim” so only provide input when and how it is needed.

Nicknames



She came to understand and appreciate some American nicknames that were given to her.

U.S. Host Family

Thai parents give nicknames to their children. These names often have no relationship to a given name and can be made-up, humorous or a nonsense word. Sometimes they seem strange translated into English (e.g. "Apple"). They are usually one syllable and are very useful when compared to the length of many Thai names. Nicknames are not used in formal settings.



Use nicknames to show affection and friendship. However you might consider asking your student to change his or her nickname if it is an offensive word in English (such as "Porn" which is a common Thai nickname), or would be a negative description of the student ("Hippo" would be fine for a slim student, but might be considered inappropriate for someone who is chubby). If an English translation of a Thai nickname is used be sure it is a name the Thai student can pronounce clearly in English and be understood when he or she introduces himself or herself to Americans. For example, names starting with "r" may be hard to pronounce.

Independence/Dependence

Thai students have not been encouraged to make their own decisions. Thai families tend to be quite close and the parents are accustomed to making choices for their children. When families eat together even the choice of food is made for them. This lack of choice also applies in Thai high schools where the courses that students take at each grade level are set. Thai schools all require uniforms and specify hairstyles. Thai students are not usually given many choices until they go to upper secondary school or university or become financially independent from their parents after college.

As a result of all these factors, students from Thailand may be unaccustomed to making choices on their own and may need assistance especially early on in the exchange experience.

*Thai girls seem to have a very hard time making decisions, even easy decisions.
They may need to be more prepared for this.*

U.S. Host Family

*She was very controlled by her natural mother and felt inferior if she did not make
the same choice her mother did.*

U.S. Host Family

Help your Thai student learn to make decisions by giving limited choices and, if necessary, explaining the advantages and disadvantages of each choice.

*When I was first in the U.S. and was having to choose my own classes it was very
difficult. I just wanted someone to tell me what to take, I was not used to making
decisions for myself and it was terribly hard.*

Thai Hosted Student

We value independence; they value getting along and not making waves.

U.S. Host Family

Religion & Beliefs

Many Thai practices discussed throughout this handbook have their basis in Buddhist beliefs. Specific practices will be addressed in separate sections. This section introduces issues which may arise between host families and Thai students related to religious differences.

Thailand is a country with a constitution and a history of supporting a broad acceptance of people of different religions. The king of Thailand has historically been Buddhist. In Thailand Buddhism is a required class in school at every grade level unless a student's family requests an exemption because they practice a different religion. Thai Muslim students may attend a Muslim school and take classes on Islam.

94.6% of Thais are Buddhists, 4.6% are Muslim, 0.7% are Christian and 0.1% are other religions including Hindu (2000 Census).

Most Thai students coming to the U.S. do not expect to be in a household which practices their religion, or even in a community with others of their faith. However, exchange students still bring with them their religious convictions and perspectives through which they view U.S. American life.

Buddhism is generally practiced without communal services. Prayers can be private and often unobserved by others. Traditional beliefs may also be practiced in some families. For example, the head of the bed should not be toward the south, the direction to which the souls of the dead go, nor toward the bathroom.

She didn't follow the religion but was influenced by it.

U.S. Host Family



Both boys were superstitious. Our house backs to a creek. [According to] the boys, a house that faces away from the water is good luck. When facing a big test/challenge, it is common to bargain with Buddha. "If you'll let me score well on the test, I will run across Bangkok." I don't remember all the superstitions that we've been told but they are common.

U.S. Host Family



U.S. American host families need to keep in mind that although their Thai son or daughter may not attend religious services nor ever have embraced traditional practices in Thailand, they come from a culture pervaded by Buddhism and its beliefs and practices.

Attending Religious Services

Many U.S. Americans regularly attend religious services as a family. The social life and youth activities of some families are centered on their friends from their church, temple or mosque. When a host son or daughter is of a different faith this can create a dilemma: Should the host student be treated the same as their host siblings in attending religious services and activities?



Exchange students *are not* to be expected to attend religious services or activities. Exchange students may be invited to participate, as the student wishes, for the cultural experience and social aspects. Beforehand, explain to the student what to expect to see as well as your expectations for exchange student behavior during services and prayers.

The Christian religion is very different from Buddhism. She would attend church with us periodically, but we didn't force her. We also inquired about her faith, in an effort to understand and express her feelings. We took her to a Buddhist temple and she really enjoyed that, and respected us more for making that effort.

U.S. Host Family

Our student did "meditate" as part of his Buddhist faith. Occasionally I would inadvertently interrupt this. He never seemed to mind. We discussed our different religions openly and he did accompany us to our church a number of times.

U.S. Host Family



Oh wait... there is always the issue of CHURCH. As a family we attend church on Sundays. We compromised on this a lot (both sides) and it worked out...but [the Thai students] were unprepared for this aspect of our culture.

U.S. Host Family

I have learned to enjoy the differences and even celebrate them as part of our family practices. For example, we're Roman Catholic and always said the typical Catholic prayer before eating...but now we say either a silent prayer or a more general thanksgiving prayer whenever a non-Christian is present. It's just a common courtesy to be "inclusive" versus "in your face" with our faith.

U.S. Host Family



If possible, take your student to his/her place of worship for a special occasion. The student will appreciate your thoughtfulness and also have an opportunity to connect with his/her religious rituals.

The Middle Way – Guiding Life Philosophy

Buddhist emphasis on meditation and peaceful co-existence may lead Thai students to react to situations differently than a U.S. American student. You may not find extreme reactions in Thai students. Instead they may have a calm, neutral-appearing response.



I became more aware of his acceptance of situation – he always accepted certain things without trying to explain them or change them, unlike Americans, who always want to "make it right." I think this may be a reflection of his Buddhist upbringing.

U.S. Host Family



She had a completely different view about how to handle adversity and challenge. As a Buddhist, she claimed that if you are striving for something and it does not come easily, you should take that as a sign that it was not meant to be. There were several times that we tried to encourage her to become involved in activities, but at the first sign of even minor things like transportation complications or scheduling conflicts, she would give up on the activity instead of finding a solution to make it work. She told us on more than one occasion that it represented the "middle way"; following the path of least resistance as life presents it. This was unfortunately very much at odds with some of our core beliefs.

U.S. Host Family



Host families should be careful to assess situations for their host student to smooth the path when the student is encountering difficulties. A measured or calm response to a situation by a Thai student should not necessarily be interpreted as indifference or agreement. Discuss situations with your student to prepare him or her for what is likely to happen, especially when the situation is new.

Ramadan for Muslim Students

The Muslim holiday that may have the most impact upon the family life of a family hosting a Muslim Thai student is Ramadan, a month of fasting during daylight hours. This holiday falls early in the hosting experience for year-program students, beginning sometime in August or September, when communication may still be limited by the English language development of the Thai student.



Fortunately, there are many resources about typical Muslim practices during Ramadan which host families should read prior to the beginning of the holiday. Ask your exchange program representative for the YES Cultural Handbook and see the web links for current year dates for Islamic Holidays and explanations of the major holidays in Appendix E.



Remember your student will have his or her own preferences as to how to observe his or her holiday and you should discuss specifically to what extent and how the student wishes to observe the holiday in the U.S.

If the student is Muslim be ready for a different life for the duration of Ramadan, providing place for prayer, etc. It takes a while before students talk about what they're doing, often because of communication (language) skills.

U.S. Host Family



Our student was Muslim so there were lots of family life and food differences. We got to learn lots about the Muslim religions, its traditions, food requirements, fasting periods, prayer periods, etc. Our student held fast to her beliefs while here in the U.S.

U.S. Host Family

We followed her Muslim diet, which prohibited pork and required a fast during Ramadan. She showered twice a day.

U.S. Host Family



Our student was Muslim and so had different dietary requirements during Ramadan. We were lucky as she was so easy to have in our home. She really became part of our family.

U.S. Host Family

Wet dogs were not to be around her. She was ok with cats, but dogs represented filth. This seemed strange until she explained it as part of her faith, and her need to be clean when she prayed.

U.S. Host Family

Life Cycle Customs

Life cycle customs related to birthdays, weddings, childbirth, coming of age, school years, aging relatives and death are other times that Thai students' religious customs may create differences with U.S. American families. Events U.S. Americans put a large significance on, such as high school graduation, may be viewed as less significant in Thai culture.



Both boys are from VERY close-knit families. They will live with their parents and grandparents through college and until they are married. The U.S. culture values independence from family. College kids move away, get an apartment and a job. I appreciated the Thai family unity.

U.S. Host Family

Thai Buddhist students' views on life and death, including reincarnation, and the rituals to observe those events may differ significantly from those of the U.S. host family which can lead to misunderstanding and even hurt feelings at an emotional time. Traditional Thai funerals last for a week. Crying is discouraged during the funeral, so as not to worry the spirit of the deceased.



When the host family (or natural family of the exchange student back home) is observing a life cycle event, the host family may wish to talk with their host son or daughter about how that event would be celebrated in Thailand and its significance, in contrast or similarity.

She did not appreciate our pets. During the course of her stay, we lost two of our four pets and she did not try to understand how this affected our family.

U.S. Host Family



He did not treat our family pets as members of the family as we do. When I dispatched a dying rat, he was disturbed that I had injured or killed a living thing. They respect all life and this didn't square with those beliefs.

U.S. Host Family

Religious and National Symbols

Different religions use different symbols and icons as reminders to their practitioners of their faith or beliefs. Catholic Christians may display a crucifix on their wall. Jews may wear a Star of David or chai necklace or have a mezuzah on the doorpost of their house. All over Thailand one sees spirit houses for the ancestors with fresh offerings of food and flowers. Large posters of the King and Queen of Thailand are seen on display outside and indoors in Thailand, just as American flags are flown outside or displayed all over the U.S.

These symbols evoke emotional responses based on the association the viewer has with the religion, ethnic groups practicing the religion, historical events, etc. related to the symbol or object. A Thai student might react in unexpected ways or fail to react; for example to a decorated Christmas tree. Their reaction might seem unusual to their host family.



Before judging the student's reaction, the host family might want to ask their exchange son or daughter what associations they have with the symbol or object .

We took our student to a museum exhibit we thought was very intriguing. She was unusually quiet and withdrawn. Upon asking, we found the objects in the exhibit reminded her of an historic conflict where many of her countrymen suffered abuses. This became an opportunity for our family to learn about the emotional toll on a group of people of an event we had viewed before as just something in a history book.

U.S. Host Family



Our student was insulted by the Asian design on the curtains we put up in her room. What we associated with a positive travel experience, she saw as an indirect put-down of her country. This might have partially explained her defensiveness about everything from her country when we thought we were just being curious in a positive way.

U.S. Host Family

As far as "taboo" topics, the only thing I would say is that the Thai people are very affectionate [towards] their King. Any negative thing said about him would be an insult.

U.S. Host Family



Show respect for religious symbols and rituals, and avoid touching spirit houses and household altars if your student constructs them. Thai people, particularly those from rural areas, can be highly superstitious and may feel the need for lengthy ritual should you “contaminate” their sacred areas.

It is an unpardonable error of sacrilege to misuse a Buddha image. Icons should be kept in a place of worship, not used as pieces of furniture, as ornaments, or for commercial

advertisement. It is fine though to hang a Buddha from your neck. Many Thai people do so for protection and to attract good luck.



U.S. Americans like to decorate their homes and gardens with Buddhist figures, sometimes just a bust of Buddha, and many times the placement is on ground level. Our student was offended by the impropriety of non-Buddhists displaying these "decorations" in disrespectful manners.

U.S. Host Family



Also be careful to respect the Buddhist attitudes toward the various parts of the body. For example, patting someone on the top of the head is not acceptable because the top of the body is considered to be the most holy. Similarly, putting food near ones feet, e.g. having a lunch bag on the floor of the car near your feet, may be distressing since the feet are the least holy part of the body.

Learning basic tenants of your Thai host son or daughter's religion can help prevent misunderstandings and enhance your hosting experience.

Study Thai culture before hosting. There are a number of resources on the web that can help out. Predominately, be yourself. [Our student] was very clear on that she wanted to learn about culture here, but also wanted to teach us about Thai culture.

U.S. Host Family



Although our exchange student attended church with us and participated in youth activities, he was a devout Buddhist and I believe we could have done more by studying Buddhism.

U.S. Host Family

We had done some research on Thai customs, etc., before her arrival. Some things are important, especially if the student is Buddhist. While we are accustomed to rubbing our children on the head as a sign of affection, this is an insult to a Buddhist, as the top of the head is the most holy place. You also have to be careful not to point your foot at someone's head, as the foot is the least holy, since it touches the ground.

U.S. Host Family

Holidays

Public holidays in Thailand include both national and religious holidays. Refer to Appendix D.

Religious holidays often create strong emotions in exchange students because of the associated family gatherings, ritual, beliefs or activities tied to the holiday.



Host families may wish to familiarize themselves with the major religious holidays of their Thai student so they can provide any extra support their student might need. Host families can ask their student about how they celebrate at home and may even be able to imitate a bit of the holiday in America. Ex: Songkran in April, a water-splashing day in Thailand. Just acknowledging the student's holiday may brighten their day and let them know you want to understand their culture.

If possible host families may be able to make an effort a couple times during the year to get their exchange student together with other Thais or people of the same faith in the U.S. to celebrate a Thai or religious holiday together.

Sharing holiday traditions from the U.S. with your exchange student is often a rewarding cultural exchange.

We certainly paid more attention to her Thai customs and holidays and she did to ours. Made for a richer life.

U.S. Host Family

Traditions such as birthdays and, of course, religious holidays don't culminate in mounds of gifts as they do here. She was a bit surprised by all the presents she received at those times. Surprised, but pleased.

U.S. Host Family



Be clear about your expectations from student. Let them know about your holidays and how you celebrate them. Let them know when it would be expected to give a gift, write a thank you note or participate in an event.

U.S. Host Family

(She) liked to wear the color yellow on Friday to signify King Day. She loved her King.

U.S. Host Family

We all gained an appreciation of Thai culture – she had a big party on the King's birthday with squirt guns and everyone wore a yellow shirt.

U.S. Host Family

Color Days

In Thai tradition, there is an astrological rule (which has influence from Hindu mythology) that assigns color for each day of the week. The color is assigned based on the color of the God who protects the day. These colors of the day are the traditional Thai birthday colors. For example, King Bhumibol was born on Monday, so on his birthday throughout Thailand yellow decorations adorn homes, businesses, schools, etc.

Day	Color of the day	Planet	God of the day
Sunday	red	Sun	Surya
Monday	yellow	Moon	Chandra
Tuesday	pink	Mars	Mangala
Wednesday	green	Mercury	Budha
Thursday	orange	Jupiter	Brihaspati
Friday	blue	Venus	Shukra
Saturday	purple	Saturn	Shani

Family Life

คับที่อยู่ได้คับใจอยู่ยาก

Transliteration: khap thee yuu dai khap jai yuu yaak

Literal: Tight residence can, tight heart presence difficult

Meaning: It is possible to live in a small residence if you're happy with the people you live with, but it is difficult to live even in a big residence if you're unhappy.

Urban vs. Rural

Like the U.S., the majority of the population lives in the large cities, but most of the land is rural and 42% of commercial business is still agricultural. City life is more similar to that in U.S. cities with both parents usually working. Parental roles are more balanced, although the father usually is not expected to cook or do household work. However, since schools run later, parents and children tend to get home around the same time. City students have access to technology and public transportation and may have more independence to go places. It is common to buy food from street vendors, so a family may bring in some meals or students may eat snacks on their way home.

Rural areas in Thailand differ more from the Thai cities than rural areas in the U.S. differ from U.S. cities. Public utilities and technology are lacking and housing is significantly different in rural Thailand. In the villages, extended family with many generations may live in one house or several houses in a compound. Houses may be traditional, built on posts where domestic animals like buffalos and chickens live below and the family lives above, often in a single room. There is little privacy and the communal life style instills a strong sense of social harmony in which tact, compromise, and tolerance are essential. The father is regarded as the leader, but the mother also plays a significant role particularly in the family finances.

It is common in rural areas for children to be sent to a boarding school during the week, starting when they are around U.S. American grade level 7, although they often come home for weekends. Sometimes the children will be sent to live with a relative in a city to attend school. Even in the cities children may attend boarding schools during the week starting as young as in kindergarten, since transportation from home to a good school may take too much time.



She was from Bangkok and seemed to fit in to our life style easily.

U.S. Host Family

Relationships with Friends and Siblings



It was eye-opening to witness how difficult it was for such a warm and friendly person to make friends at first.

U.S. Host Family

She made many acquaintances, but few friends. She picked friends very wisely and specifically.

U.S. Host Family

Usually the Thai student will take longer to develop friends than is true for U.S. students or even exchange students from other countries. While this is linked to the issue of independence and the Thai school experience, it is also due to unfamiliarity with U.S. ways, the difficulties of moving from classroom to classroom in U.S. schools, and/or problems with language. As discussed under the section on schools, Thai schools are not structured like ours. The same group of middle and high school students often spend years together in the classroom and never change classmates. There are fewer organized sports or clubs, so the student might not be an athlete. The student might meet someone in school in the U.S., but not try to make plans to get together outside school. Thai students spend much of their time studying after school and may not have friends over. In Thailand, parents work in round-about ways. They rarely stop doting. If the mom wants her child to accomplish something at school, then she will call the school and talk to a teacher to get the message to her child. The teacher works behind the scene and gets things done, like course changes or arranging social encounters, which no U.S. American parent could ever accomplish through the school teacher. The differences in schools need to be understood by both family and students.



You need to facilitate peer interactions. Students are hesitant to ask adults for this type of help, but the student will become very much more outgoing with their peers as interactions increase and improve.

U.S. Host Family



From your first days with your student, help him/her to find methods to meet other students and to get involved in activities where he/she will get to know their peers better than they have time to in the class or lunch room.



She was in 10th grade, but still very young, more on a 6th grade level. She was into Hello Kitty and the Disney Channel.

U.S. Host Family

Siblings in Thailand do not tend to be competitive. Thai students tend to be closest to siblings nearest to them in age.

Friendships

เพื่อนกินหาง่าย เพื่อนตายหายาก

Transliteration: pheuuan gin haa ngaay pheuuan dtaay haa yaak

Literal: Friends for a meal are easy to find, friends until end of life are difficult to find

Meaning: It is easy to find fair-weather friends in good times but hard to find real friends who stand by you in all situations of life.

In Thai school boys are always friends with boys, and girls are always friends with girls. In Thailand having friends of the opposite gender is discouraged. Students do many activities in groups. Marriage is discouraged until one's education is complete. Students do not hold hands or engage in other behaviors (hugging, kissing) with students of the opposite gender and Thai students may be uncomfortable with the interactions between opposite genders that they witness at school. However, it is acceptable for students of the same sex to hold hands and to walk together holding hands. Thai students are generally not accustomed to initiating plans and will expect you as the host parent to suggest and/or arrange their schedule for them and they will seek out your permission to participate in any after school activity.

Encourage the Thai kids to invite school friends to do things together outside of school. Both of our Thai kids were shy about that.

U.S. Host Family



Our Thai boy was invited to attend a movie by guys from high school for the first time in mid APRIL. That is a long time with a poor social life. He got along better with "silly acting girls" who were outgoing and friendly.

U.S. Host Family



Try to find one or more students in the host school that could serve as a mentor to your Thai student in the first days and weeks of school.

Schools

เดินตามผู้ใหญ่ หมาไม่กัด

Transliteration: Dern tarm phu-yai mha mai khud

Literal: When you follow the old man, the dog will not bite.

Meaning: Follow the wiseman and you will be safe from harm.

ครูคือพระคุณที่สาม

Transliteration: Kru kue pra koon tee saam

Meaning: Thai teacher is the third most important person in a student's life (after their two parents).

Thai schools are organized differently than schools in the U.S. There is more structure, based on cultural traditions, and classes are generally required with little choice of elective classes. Teachers and students have a formal relationship. Students address them as "teacher first name." For example: Krue Krisanee or Ajarn Krisanee means Teacher Krisanee. The principal is usually just called by his or her title of "Director." While outside of class students may be noisy and interactive, in the classroom the students are quiet and respectful. Like high schools in many countries, for all but special classes such as computer and science labs, students remain in the same room with their classmates for the entire day and the teachers circulate to the various rooms. Most schoolwork is individual, not in groups or requiring presentations. Thai students may find it difficult at first to work on assignments in groups and give presentations in front of the class in the U.S. For more information on the Thai education system refer to Appendix C.

Thai students may be surprised by the casual, friendly relationship between students and U.S. teachers even when they are outside the school setting.

All of the boys commented about how "laid back" we were in schools and as a society but they didn't really complain.

U.S. Host Family

All of my boys were very respectful to teachers and me as father/teacher.

U.S. Host Family

Assist your student in setting up a class schedule for high school. Instead of asking "what classes would you like to take?" make suggestions on what you think might be appropriate. Thai students might need to be encouraged to try new classes that they can't take at home.

A Muslim Thai girl wearing a head scarf as a religious statement should not be limited in her school or co-curricular activities.



When some Thai students have the freedom to choose their clothes for the first time they may go to extremes and dress inappropriately. Help your student to make appropriate clothing choices for school the first few days until he or she has an idea of what other students are wearing.

Social Activities and Sports at School

Your Thai student may find the emphasis on sports, the arts, and outdoor activities after school unusual. They might prefer to spend the extra time after school on academics. They may lack the social skills needed for team sports. In U.S. schools the challenge will be encouraging your Thai student to take classes for fun and social opportunity, rather than only taking academic classes.

Our student was academically prepared and very motivated for success. Although she struggled a bit with English, especially at the beginning of her stay, she earned above average grades.

U.S. High School

She was a member of the chorus, cheerleading, several clubs, and other activities. She fit in very well with the senior class and made many friends.

U.S. High School



Thai students might do well if they sign up for some classes that encourage social interaction, like drama, foods, music, physical education, etc. Also encourage after-school sports as another way for Thai students to learn social skills and make friends.

Homework

In Thailand students are required to complete and hand in homework, however it is not graded and it does not contribute to the student's final grade. Since it is not graded, homework may be copied directly from another student or cut and pasted from the internet. It is checked to determine if it has been completed. Homework is called "process" while tests are called "knowledge." Students often have free periods during the school day to socialize or complete homework.



Since homework is graded in the U.S. and copying other student's work or cutting and pasting from the internet on a topic is not allowed, this can cause confusion and poor grades in school. Clearly explain the importance of homework towards the final grade and expectations for a student to do all his or her own work and to hand it in on time.



Review your student's homework assignments with him/her during the first weeks of school to reinforce the importance of completing homework on time.

You may need to provide or arrange for your student to receive help with his/her homework from a host sibling or other student. This will have the added benefit of providing another opportunity for social interaction for your student.

Thai students have a "high need to get 'A's'... an 'A-' is seen as not good... or even BAD. A 'B' is seen as unacceptable.

U.S. Host Family



Thai students already seem to have a good work ethic. Sometimes it's hard to get them to do something creative in school because of the need to do such high science or math oriented classes.

U.S. Host Family

English Learning

For Thai students, learning English can be a challenge, especially for students from the rural areas of Thailand. Thai students learn English as a foreign language as opposed to English as a second language. They may not learn conversational English or practice speaking aloud in English, except to repeat words or phrases after the teacher. The teachers are not generally native English speakers, particularly in rural areas.



Help your student improve his or her spoken English by having casual conversations. Encourage younger children to speak with your student. Your student may want to sign up to be a teacher's aide at an elementary school. Watching movies with subtitles can help for learning conversation. Reading children's books aloud and, best of all, making friends his or her own age will improve spoken English.

Muslim Students at School

Muslim students may need a clean location for daily prayers at school and/or release time for prayers, including being off campus for some Friday prayers, and understanding for the use of head coverings and other apparel.



An understanding about the use of head coverings and other apparel would be good for host families to know in advance.

It would be helpful for host parents to contact the school to make sure they are aware of the student's needs related to religion.

School Support

A Thai student may not speak up for himself or herself about class assignments, scheduling or personal needs. Although a Thai student might talk about the problem, he or she won't necessarily discuss this with someone who could help make needed changes.



I spent WEEKS trying to convince him to ask us when he didn't understand something and he just 'couldn't' 98% of the time.

U.S. Host Family

It is usually a shock to their system that there is so much available to them, both educationally and socially.

U.S. High School



Host parents might ask the school counselor to arrange for a teacher or other contact at school to take the Thai student “under his or her wing” to talk to about the student’s specific needs.

U.S. American schools require all medications, even over-the-counter medicines, to be kept at the school office and dispensed by a school employee. Thai students will be used to bringing their own medicines and taking them by themselves at school. If medicine is needed, explain the U.S. school requirements for medicine dispensing to your Thai student and get the proper paperwork signed.

School Fees

In the U.S. there are fees for lunches, student body cards, sports, dances, sports clothing, sports equipment, physical for sports, yearbook, class fees/trips, etc. In Thailand the costs at school are funded by the school or family.



Explain to your student which school fees and expenses he or she will be expected to pay and when during the school year they are due.

Open or Closed Campus

In Thai schools all campuses are closed and may have guards. Some schools in the U.S. have open campuses where a student is permitted to leave a school campus during the time school is in session, e.g. for lunch. They may first need to receive an off-campus permit which has been requested by their parent or guardian.



Explain to your Thai student what it means when his or her school has an open campus and what steps he or she will need to take, if any, before leaving campus.

Social Values

Pregnant teens or teens with children are not atypical in U.S. high schools, but would almost never be found in Thailand. Teenagers in Thailand are generally not allowed to date.



Another shock was when she sat beside a pregnant student in class. This never would have happened in Thailand.

U.S. Host Family

Personal Hygiene

Personal hygiene is often a difficult topic for U.S. American families to discuss, but cultural differences often create issues for host families and Thai exchange students.

Although some Thai students from the big cities live in modern houses with western style bathrooms, typical Thai bathrooms are very different from U.S. American bathrooms. U.S. American bathrooms are kept dry except in the bathtub or shower enclosure. Thai bathrooms are tiled all over and water can be splashed anywhere. U.S. American toilets flush using a handle and toilet paper is flushed down the toilet. Thai toilets are flushed using scoops of water from a clean basin or wall faucet and the body is rinsed with a water sprayer. Toilet paper is not flushed down a Thai toilet, but if it is used, it is placed in the waste basket. If a Thai student puts soiled toilet paper in the wastebasket a U.S. American family is likely to be upset and wonder why. The Thai student may be wondering where is the water sprayer for washing themselves and be uncomfortable having to use toilet paper.



Host families need to take the time to carefully show Thai students how to use toilets, showers, baths and sinks at their house. How to properly turn on, adjust the temperature and turn off faucets needs to be demonstrated. The details of toilet paper usage, proper amounts and disposal may need to be discussed, as well as the distinction between toilet paper, facial tissues and paper towels and how they are to be disposed. Proper disposal of feminine hygiene products needs to be discussed with girls. Where to get and hang towels after usage should be explained. If the student will be cleaning his/her own bathroom, how to do so and what products to be used should be demonstrated. Fire extinguishers and safety electrical outlet resetting may be shown.

Remember, however, a student is often fatigued when they first arrive and their understanding of English may be minimized when they are tired, so you may need to repeat all these instructions a few times in the weeks after their arrival.

Thai showers and bathtubs may be in a separate area in the bathroom, but shower curtains are not needed because the entire bathroom is tiled and has drainage. Thai students often take showers two or more times a day because of the hot weather in Thailand. When they shower they will also put on fresh clothing because of perspiration. Students may use two towels when they shower as explained below.



Muslim students may need to rinse their arms, hands, legs, feet and face before prayer five times a day. They may be used to dripping dry in hot weather, but the host family may want the bathroom floor kept dry. Accommodations can be made with a pail for water in the bathtub or a hand held water sprayer in the shower and floor mats to be used, then hung to dry.

Hot water is often expensive in the U.S. so host families in temperate climates may not want their Thai student showering as often and generating as much dirty laundry as they have been used to.



Explain bathing standards and the use of shower curtains and bathing times in your household along with why washing less often may be required in cooler weather. Tell the student of the expense of heating water for showers and laundry. Explain how and when laundry is to be washed, dried and folded. If the student is expected to do his or her own laundry, be sure to carefully explain how to properly use the machines. These instructions may have to be refined or repeated.

In the U.S. students are expected to use deodorant, brush their teeth, and keep their skin clean. To be accepted in a U.S. school these are important considerations in order to make friends and be accepted.



If you notice any personal hygiene issues with your Thai student, address them immediately so the student will be accepted in school. For example, if a student has body odor explain what they should use and give them deodorant or take them shopping as he or she may not know where to purchase deodorant in the U.S. The same may be true for skin care products or toothpaste and toothbrush.

Thai people wash the top of the body clothes separately from the bottom half, i.e. shirts and sweaters go in one wash and socks, underwear and pants go in another. This is because, as Buddhists, they believe the lower part of the body is unclean. This is part of their religion. A Buddhist Thai would also never take off or put on a skirt over their heads for the same reason. The same rule applies when hanging out the washing on the line. Clothes from the lower part of the body are not placed next to or higher than clothes worn on the top part of the body.

The same rule applies to drying yourself after washing. If you take a shower you should not use the same towel for the whole body, the correct way is to use one for the upper part (the head) and another for the lower parts. It would be useful to make sure your Thai student has more than one towel in case this is an issue with them.



Our Thai daughter washed her own underwear and socks, but everything else went into the regular laundry with the family clothes.

U.S. Host Family

Other Factors

ขี่ช้างจับตั๊กแตน

Transliteration: Kee chang jahb thak-a-thaen

Literal: [Don't] Ride an elephant to catch a grasshopper.

Meaning: Use the correct tool for the correct job.

There are many external cultural factors which are not part of the student-family relationship, but which nevertheless have an impact on the student becoming part of a new culture and having to live in a different environment. Some of these are listed here, but we encourage host families to do further reading on them using some of the suggested readings at the end of the handbook.

Economy

Average income in the two countries is quite different. This affects the price of things relative to the student's experience. Even those students who come from affluent families may be reluctant to purchase things which seem too expensive to them (e.g. clothing, food, books). However, they may be quite willing to spend money on things which seem cheaper to them (e.g. electronics).



Host parents often need to give students advise about what is a good value and what items they need to purchase versus what items are optional.

Internet Availability

Students in most Thai cities are accustomed to having ready access to high-speed Internet. Thai parents do not normally monitor student internet use or content since they themselves may not be computer savvy, so the student may be used to accessing adult content and games. In Thailand cell phone usage is normal and inexpensive.



Upon arrival let students know if and how you will be monitoring their computer usage for time online and acceptable content. Advise your student about the cost of cell phone plans and texting here in the U.S.

Environmental Issues

In many ways the U.S. is a “throw away” society and we generate huge amounts of waste compared to Thailand. However, recycling programs are not common in Thailand and waste is becoming a problem.



Talk to your student about how the recycling program works in your community – separation of different types of recyclables, what is not recycled, etc.

Concept of Time in Thailand

The *Mai Pen Rai* philosophy is well demonstrated by the Thai concept of time. Estimates of time, in terms of the past or the future, can be vague or even wildly inaccurate in Thailand. In the countryside times of the day may be counted in the traditional way of the number of gongs after a time in the morning or noon. For example, 3 a.m. can mean 3 gongs (or hours) after 6 a.m. in the morning which would be 9 a.m. There is no past/future tense in the Thai language. In Thailand, people are often late for appointments, but nobody seems to mind waiting. Traffic jams are common, restaurant service, and hotel check-in procedures can seem slow and inefficient, but you won't see Thai people getting upset about it. If you must ask “When will you be ready to leave?” or “when will this job be done?” go ahead. But be prepared for an answer that proves wrong, not because of bad planning, but simply a different attitude towards time.



Discuss the family and school schedule with your student and expectations as to how far in advance of leaving you expect the student to be ready to go.

Thai Food and Etiquette

Thai cuisine blends four distinct tastes through the use of various ingredients:

- spicy hot (chilies)
- sour (vinegar, tamarind, lime)
- sweet (fruits, sweet peppers)
- salty (soy sauce, fish sauce)

These are combined for most meals with additional flavors being added with herbs and spices, especially lemongrass, turmeric, garlic, ginger and sweet Thai basil. The presentation of the food is very important and will often include vegetable and fruit “sculptures” as decoration for an important meal or on a buffet. Rice will be a staple at every meal.

Thai families generally eat together, most often at the evening meal. Once the eldest person starts eating the others can start.

Most Thai food is prepared or put on the plate in bite-size units—most easily handled with a spoon and fork. . Don't be surprised when your Thai student does not quite know where to start when eating a six-ounce chunk of meat. No knife is needed at the table.



He did not know how to use a knife and fork!

U.S. Host Family

Instead of passing serving dishes around, they are placed in the center of the eating area and each person serves themselves small amounts, leaving the serving spoon in the dish.



At the dinner table our student reached across the table for food instead of asking....

U.S. Host Family



Be patient with table manners initially and help the student learn U.S. American eating style and utensils.

Thai mothers or domestic help cook for Thai children. They may purchase food at school or from a street vendor, but they are unlikely to be used to preparing meals for themselves.



If the student is expected to prepare his or her own meals, for example for breakfast, or to make a sandwich or heat leftovers, the host family will need to show the student how and let him or her know when to do so.

Have the student cook with and for you. It will give them a chance to share in a non-verbal way the differences in food. And it helps to bring the student into the family life.



The need for spicy food dropped considerably through the year.

U.S. Host Family

Thai food is generally eaten with spicy sauces, which can be used on almost all foods and at almost all meals.



Get a favorite hot sauce and dried ground chilies and keep them on the table for your student. And don't be insulted when these are used at each meal.

Modesty/Nudity/Sexuality

อย่าเปิดฝาเรือน

Transliteration: yaa bpeert faa reuuan

Literal: Don't open a wall of your house.

Modesty

Compared to many other cultures, students from Thailand are quite modest, especially in their dress. This is noticeable not only in schools, where the students wear uniforms, but in other public venues as well.

For example, whereas people going to the beach in the U.S. are apt to have on a minimal amount of clothing and lie in the sun to get a good tan, such activities would be frowned upon



in Thailand. Thai beaches that are frequented by the Thai people are often covered with umbrellas so that people may stay out of the sun. Those that do go in the water are apt to be fully clothed. Darker skin in Thailand is viewed as an attribute of the lower class (people who have to work outside in the sun), and is generally avoided.



Our student seemed to be more modest than most teenage girls. She was very confident in herself and did not need to follow trends.

U.S. Host Family



He was very modest (physically) e.g., he had trouble with high school dances and wouldn't even consider playing sports because he didn't want a physical.

U.S. Host Family

She wore jeans to school here, while at home she wore a uniform. She wore make-up to school, at home she could not.

U.S. Host Family



[Our student] was very, very shy and self-conscious about showing his body, even though we had had a number of pictures of him at the beach with his family before he arrived. We also had a pool at our house, and it was difficult to persuade him to get in with the other students and teens when we had parties, or to go to the water park with them. He eventually did when we found a really baggy jamz type swimsuit

for him to wear along with a T-shirt.

U.S. Host Family

She was very uncomfortable if my husband removed his shirt (in the summer, in the yard or at the beach).

U.S. Host Family

She had cultural concerns about having dark skin and therefore would not spend time in the sun even to play a game of croquet. She would use an umbrella outside on sunny days and had special lotion for whitening her skin.

U.S. Host Family

He also did not want to go swimming or be outdoors too much in the heat of the day. Did not want his skin to darken AT ALL.

U.S. Host Family

Nudity/Sexuality

Thai students do not expect to date or have friends of the opposite sex during high school. Touching someone of the opposite sex in public is considered inappropriate, but friends of the same sex, generally only females, may hold hands or put an arm around each other's shoulders. Spending the night at friend's houses is not common.

Public nudity is prohibited and showering after physical education class in school is unlikely.

Muslim girls may keep their head covered will remain covered around all men who are not relatives – this may include the host father. This is a dictate from the Koran on modesty. The Muslim girl will then only show herself to her husband, once married.



I have had our own kids take very frank sex ed classes, and had a previous exchange student (from Norway) who slept over with his girlfriend, so I asked her if she planned to have a boyfriend while she was here (the girlfriend situation had been a big headache for us, and I told her so). She was quiet at first, then said she would be a virgin when she married, so I didn't need to worry. It was a frank answer, she was not shocked by my asking, and I thanked her for being honest and also because that was an excellent and wise plan, which would also save us/ me a lot of trouble!

U.S. Host Family



We recommend our students join sports teams, and our son was on the swim team. She considered joining, but it was only after she went to one of the team's early parties and had a good conversation with one of the other students that she decided she would. She then asked me to take her to buy tampons, and surprised me in the aisle when presented with the options -- she had never used one before. So right there we discussed the various kinds (I am a gynecologist), and thereafter she never needed any assistance. She also recommended to other Thai girls that they too could join their school swim teams, but the other girls were too shy, or perhaps couldn't bear the idea of using tampons. This was the first inkling I had that our girl, though very quiet, was really brave.

U.S. Host Family



Host families may wish to open the topic of dating and mixed group parties with their exchange student so the student will feel more open to asking for advice if she or he needs help understanding the social situation of her or his U.S. peers and how she or he can safely participate.

Talk to your student about the differences between Thai sexual values and relationships and those in your community and family.

Diversity/Prejudice/Disability

เข้าเมืองตาหลิ่ว ต้องหลิ่วตาตาม

Transliteration: Khao mueng tar-lew, tong lew-tar tarm

Literal: When in the city of the slanted-eyed, do squint your eyes.

Meaning: When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

Diversity

Outside of Thailand's capital and other cities, many residents have had relatively little sustained exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles, though they may have had some contact with the many tourists who visit each year. What people view as typical U.S. American behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all U.S. Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes.

Although the majority of Thailand's population is both Buddhist and ethnically and linguistically Thai, there are regional linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences. The presence of many non-Thai groups also contributes to the diversity of the country. Thais generally emphasize their commonalities and the strengths that diversity contributes to their country. When differences are expressed, it is generally in subtle ways that require linguistic and cultural understanding to grasp. Thais' emphasis on tolerance, maintaining smooth relationships, and a sense of order creates a generally welcoming environment.



Despite the ideal of social harmony, there are some conflicts, which are readily apparent in the tabloid press. Thailand's social structure includes an inherent hierarchy, with competing beliefs about who is entitled to what. Thais often attempt to hide conflict as they wish to maintain harmony in the face of diversity.

Many Thais are not well-informed about the ethnic and racial diversity of the United States, and they therefore expect U.S. Americans to be Caucasian. In addition, many Thais view lighter skin as more beautiful, a perception based more on an aesthetic bias than any racial prejudice and one that existed long before encounters between Thailand and the West. African-American's, in particular, should not take Thais' views of skin color personally and should try to see them within this context. In addition, students from rural villages may have a difficult time seeing some people of color as U.S. Americans. Thai students might tell you they don't want to get dark and avoid activities that put them in direct sunlight.



You can respect the desire to avoid excessive sunlight by giving them a sunhat and sunscreen. This is a Thai value and not a comment on diversity.



Diversity in Thailand: Thai (80%), Chinese (10%), Malay (3%), and the rest are minorities (Mons, Khmers, hill tribes). Ethnic Thais form the majority, though the area has historically been a migratory crossroads, and has thus produced a degree of ethnic diversity. Integration is the norm in Thailand. Culturally and socially there is typically unity and acceptance.



As a host family you can help your Thai student understand the diversity in the United States by exploring cultural, racial, and religious diversity by attending ethnic celebrations, pointing out (maybe even visiting) the different churches, mosques, temples and synagogues; particularly if you live in or visit a large city.

Disabilities

In the U.S., the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has made accommodation of those with disabilities a national requirement. The same is not true in Thailand. People with handicaps in Thailand are very sheltered, protected and kept at home. Therefore many Thai students may have had limited contact with individuals with disabilities. Currently Thais are trying to improve the number of specialized schools for the handicapped beyond deaf and blind students. Thais have not yet begun to mainstream children with disabilities.

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Appendix A – Activities

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?

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, and level of ability.

Appendix B – References and Further Reading

AFS Cultural Handbook for the YES Program. (2007-09 edition). New York. AFS Intercultural Programs, Inc. 2009.

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http://www.peacecorpswiki.org/Diversity_and_cross-cultural_issues_in_Thailand

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/educators/enrichment/culturematters/index.html>

“Thai Cuisine” from Wikipedia: an excellent overview of ingredients.

CIA Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/th.html>

<http://www.godweb.org/IslamCalendar.htm>

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0760942.html>

Thai Holidays

<http://krabidir.com/info/thailand-holidays/>

<http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2009/thailand.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_holidays_in_Thailand
<http://www.kingdom-of-thailand.com/festivals.htm>
http://www.th4u.com/thai_public_holidays.htm
http://www.travexnet.com/thai_public_holidays.html

Islamic Holidays

<http://www.godweb.org/IslamCalendar.htm>
<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0760942.html>

Appendix C – More Information about Schools

Structure of Thai School System

The first formal comprehensive education plan was introduced in 1932. This plan highlighted four years of elementary and eight years of secondary education. This system was further refined in 1936, when five levels of education were featured; pre-primary or kindergarten, primary, secondary, pre-university, and higher education. The educational plan of 1951 was noteworthy in that it facilitated special and adult education. There are two kinds of schools – religious schools and private religious schools with a general education curricula approved for all by the Ministry of Education. Schools are generally Buddhist, but there are some predominately Muslim schools in the south of Thailand.

The structure of the Thai education system is composed of three years of preprimary education, six years of primary education, three years of lower-secondary education, and three years of upper-secondary education (in the fields of both general and vocational education)

Comparison of school levels:

<u>Ages</u>	<u>THAI Levels</u>	<u>USA Levels</u>	<u>USA School</u>
Age 3-5	Preschool	Preschool	
Age 5	Preschool	Kindergarten	Elementary School
Age 6	Pratom 1	First	Elementary School
Age 7	Pratom 2	Second	Elementary School
Age 8	Pratom 3	Third	Elementary School
Age 9	Pratom 4	Fourth	Elementary School
Age 10	Pratom 5	Fifth	Elementary School
Age 11	Pratom 6	Sixth	Middle School or Junior High School
Age 12	Mattayom 1	Seventh	Junior High School
Age 13	Mattayom 2	Eighth	Junior High School
Age 14	Mattayom 3	Ninth	Senior High School
Age 15	Mattayom 4	Tenth	Senior High School
Age 16	Mattayom 5	Eleventh	Senior High School
Age 17	Mattayom 6	Twelfth	Senior High School

Types of schools

The high schools in Thailand are three sizes: small (500-800), medium (800-1200), or large (1200-4000). The classrooms have 45-55 students in Thailand, where in the U.S. there are 25-35. Students in schools with an English Program in Thailand would have a class size of 30. In the U.S. Thai students will often be in schools with a much lower enrollment or class size. Many students in Thailand attend boarding school starting at 7th grade or Mattayom 1 level.

Thai students are accustomed to spending most of the day with a large group of same age students. They are in a class together each year during as they go through school.

Thai students are taught to be grateful, they appreciate teachers. They are accustomed to addressing teachers and other adults in a respectful way. They will generally only speak to the

teacher if a question is directed to them. They are often upset by student behaviors they experience in the classrooms.

Classes available and requirements

In Thailand there are core subjects and electives available, but they are generally not a student choice. In most schools, 95 % of the subjects the Thai students study are compulsory. Students will have 8 or 9 class periods per day and take about 13 different subjects (every subject is not studied every day). In the U.S. there will be requirements set by the exchange agency or by the school plus many choices.

The Thai system of teaching promotes passive, rote learning; for instance, students may be able to read and answer questions in a book, but don't know how to hold a conversation.

Every Thai classroom has a picture of the King, a Buddha image, and a Thai flag.

In general, a Thai family expects a student to be number one: the best, to make them proud, to do something well. This is particularly true for students hosted in Thailand, so a Thai student might think their host family in the U.S. expects this as well. In the U.S. the host family should encourage their Thai student to also make friends and have new experiences while doing their best in school.

Schedule

In Thailand 8:30-4 (4:45) Mattayom 4,5,6, but required to be at school at 8 (or other time designated for school Assembly) and schools are generally not as many hours.

The Thai school year

There are two semesters in the Thai academic year. From kindergarten to high school the first semester opens in mid-May and continues until the end of September. The second semester lasts from November until the end of February (or early March). Schools in the provinces often close briefly during the local rice planting and harvesting seasons.

The following are public holidays in Thailand when schools will not be in session:

- January 1: New Year's Day
- February: Magha Puja (commemorating the preaching of the Buddha)
- April 6: Chakri Day
- May 5: Coronation Day
- Mid-July (full moon): Asanha Puja (commemorating the Buddha's first sermon)
- Mid-to-late July: Khao Phansaa (beginning of Buddhist lent)
- August 12: Queen's Birthday
- October 23: Chulalongkorn Day
- December 5: King's Birthday
- December 10: Constitution Day

Attendance

All students must regularly attend school and assigned classes plus adhere to school's rules and regulations. In the U.S. a student who is not present in the classroom ready for work when the

bell ending the passing period rings and does not have an excuse from a school official is tardy. Tardiness may result in penalties. Thai students could be confused about this requirement when other requirements such as uniforms and respect for teachers are not mandatory.

In the U.S. students have a set schedule for a semester or year, which is often the same every day, and this is not the same as in Thailand. In Thailand exchange students often have a more varied schedule, including opportunities to volunteer off campus, or travel away from school than do Thai students in the U.S. Thai students might be expecting this flexibility.

It is compulsory for children between the ages of six and fifteen to attend school in Thailand. The upper secondary level of schooling (Matthayom 4-6) is divided into academic and vocational streams. There are academic schools, vocational school and comprehensive schools offering both academic and vocational tracks. Students who choose the academic stream usually intend to enter a university. Vocational schools offer programs that prepare students for employment or further studies. After the mandatory schooling is completed, attendance rates drop up to 50 percent, according to some statistics. Only a small percentage of students continue their education beyond secondary school.

In the U.S. a high school student graduates and not only completes a degree, but typically the student will also be making a big move in life, going off to college or moving out of the family home for a job. This is also around the age a student turns 18 years old and can vote, as well as becoming legally responsible for themselves – big life changes. In Thailand, students usually expect to continue to live with their parents throughout college and even until marriage. They leave home, often going to a relative's home, if the college they attend is unavailable nearby. Students are expected to return home to live after college, until marriage. High school graduation is just one step in education for Thai students, not the big life-changing event that U.S. student are about to undergo.

Grades

In Thailand there is a 1-4 grading system, where 1 is low and 4 is high. In the U.S. the grades are A-F, with A being high and F is failing. Thai students are very focused on grades and often take extra classes after school to help since there is competition for the best colleges. In Thailand help with homework or school work is provided by a private teacher or parents. Thai students might not be used to having consequences for copying homework or for cheating. In Thailand it is also not OK but might not have a consequence other than it being a disappointment to teachers. In the Thai English Program rules might be enforced which prepares student for a U.S. school.

Transportation

In Thailand students often ride to school in the family car. Thai students ride with family, walk, or take public transportation. Thai students might expect to be transported to school instead of being expected to ride a bike or take a bus. Due to budgetary limitations, rural schools are generally less well equipped than the schools in the cities and the standard of instruction, particularly for the English language, is much lower. Therefore, many high school students will commute 60-80 kilometers to boarding schools in the nearest city.

School Dress

Males in Thailand must be clean shaven – no moustaches or beards, but in the U.S. you may have facial hair. In Thailand there are many requirements related to hair but in the U.S. you may have dreadlocks, dyed hair, shaved head, or long hair (males too). These would not be permitted in schools in Thailand, and a shaved head is reserved for monks.

Muslim students have a different school uniform; boys wear long pants, and girls might wear a head scarf, long sleeves, leggings, and longer dress length. Most Thai students are accustomed to more modest dress styles and might feel uncomfortable in some U.S. clothing. A typical Thai uniform would include:

Boys: knee-length dark khaki or black shorts, pale white open-collar short-sleeved shirt, long socks, brown or black shoes.

Girls: knee-length dark skirt, pale white blouse with a loosely hanging bow tie for lower secondary students and pale white blouse tucked inside the skirt for upper secondary students. The uniform is complemented by white ankle socks and dark blue or black sandals.

The student's name and name of the school are often embroidered on the blouse or shirt. Some independent or international schools have uniforms more closely resembling British school uniform standards. In all Thai schools, one day per week is devoted to scouting and on that day the lower secondary school students wear scouting uniforms to school.

Appendix D – Holidays by Month

Holiday	Information about the holiday.
JANUARY	
New Year's Day	For the last several decades, the western-style New Year's day has been observed as a public holiday day in Thailand, but the traditional and most popular New Year's day for Thai people is celebrated in April and is called "SONGKRAN".
Children's Day	During this day local festivals and activities are organized by the children and adults often give special gifts to children on this day. Children are highly respected in Thailand, the respect so great that in a bus an adult will often gives his seat to a child (but not to an elderly person). Children's Day is always celebrated on the second Saturday in January.
Teacher's Day	This day is an occasion for pupils to make merit for their teachers. In Thailand, teachers are highly respected, even worshipped, for their knowledge. Pupils do not dare to embarrass their teachers by actions like asking questions.
Thai Army Day	On this day, The King visits the Army and is honored with military parades.
FEBRUARY	
Chinese New Year	<p>On the day before the Chinese New Year's Day, Thai people with Chinese roots start making offerings to Gods, their ancestors, the God of Land and the God of Luck. Offerings include steamed duck, chicken, pork heads, fresh or canned fruit, Chinese cakes (often with durian) and vegetarian food. Chinese flowers ("DOK MAI CHIN") and golden paper are also offered. On the Chinese New Year's day, family members visit each other and give each other money in red envelopes called "ANG PAO". On this day, Chinese restaurants are very busy because most families go out to eat.</p> <p>For Chinese New Year's Day parades with big dragons happen. When the dragon pass by stores, the owner often sets off thousands of firecrackers to "ask for good luck" in business. These firecrackers can be very long (2-5 meters) taking many minutes to finish.</p>
Makha Bucha Day	This day is a religious public holiday. It came from the day when 1,250 disciples from the Lord Buddha gathered to listen for the Dharma speech after Buddha's enlightenment. Merit making ceremonies take place at temples, while at night candlelit processions walk three times around the temple; one time for the Lord Buddha, one time for the Sangha - Buddhist monk community, and one time for the Dharma - Buddhist teachings.
MARCH	(no public holidays this month)
APRIL	
Chakri Day	This day commemorates the Chakri dynasty. The current King is the ninth King of the Chakri dynasty. A Royal ceremony is performed by the King to pay respects to King Rama I the Great, the founder of the Chakri Dynasty. As Chakri day happens on a Saturday, the following Monday is also a public holiday.

Songkran	Songkran is the New Year's Day in ancient celebrations, and probably the most popular holiday of the year. The "SONGKRAN" festival takes place during the hot season in the first half of April and is celebrated by throwing water, cleaning of Buddha statues, and paying respect to the older members of the community. Songkran is often a 3-day festival but often much longer in the north of Thailand. This festival is celebrated in all Buddhist "THEREVADA" countries like Thailand, Lao, Cambodia and Burma. During Songkran most local stores and businesses are closed and traffic can be very congested. Everyone gets wet, including police on duty.
MAY	
National Labor Day (banks closed)	The first day of May is a public holiday commemorating the work force of Thailand.
Coronation Day	This public holiday is a day to commemorate the coronation of King Rama IX. If Coronation day falls on a Sunday, the following Monday is also a public holiday.
Royal Ploughing Day	The Royal Ploughing Ceremony is performed every year by Brahmanic priests. This event happens in the front of the famous Bangkok temple "WAT PHRA KAEW" on the large open field called "SANAM LUANG". This ceremony symbolizes the beginning of the sowing period. Brahmin priests bless seeds and make symbolic furrows using a plough pulled by buffaloes. Once the ceremony is over, all the people watching run to the furrows in order to get the blessed seeds. These seeds are supposed to bring good harvests.
Vaisakh Bucha Day	This day is a religious event that commemorates the birth, the enlightenment and the death (entry into the nirvana) of Buddha. Temples through the country are crowded with people listening to sermons about Dharma (Buddha's teaching) and in the evening there is a candlelit procession around the main building of the temple containing the Buddha statues. As Vaisakh Bucha day happens on a Sunday, the following Monday is also a public holiday.
JUNE	(no public holidays this month)
JULY	
Mid Year Closing Day	This day signifies the midpoint of the banking year. All banks are closed and most businesses are open.
Asarnha Bucha Day	This day, which is a religious event, happens just before the Buddhist Lent day. This day commemorates the first sermon of Buddha to his five first disciples. One of them asked about being a monk. So this day is sacred because it deals with Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. There are also candlelit processions.
Khao Phansa (Buddhist Lent)	This day is a religious event. It is the beginning of the Buddhist rain retreat which lasts three months. During this period monks are not allowed to sleep outside their temple. During these three months there are no important feasts in Thailand. Even traditional Thai marriages do not happen during this period because there are no monks available for the ceremony.
AUGUST	

H.M. the Queen's Birthday (also Mothers' Day)	<p>This public holiday is the day of all the mothers of Thailand. Especially the Queen, honored as the mother of all Thai people. On this day all the buildings of Thailand are covered up with symbols of the Royalty, of the King and the Queen. As the H.M The Queen's Birthday is a Sunday, the following Monday is also a public holiday.</p> <p>During this day, mothers go to Thai schools. Children say little speeches about their love to their mother. Then each child stands in front of their mother, greets her feet ("WAI"), and expresses their love towards her.</p>
SEPTEMBER	
Mahidol Day	Mahidol Day commemorating HRH Prince Mahidol of Songkhla, the father of modern Thai medicine.
OCTOBER	
End of Buddhist Lent Day	This day is a religious event. The three months rain retreat is over for monks. Monks are allowed to go out of temples. Robes offering ceremonies ("THOT KATHIN") happen everywhere in Thailand. Thai people choose temples everywhere in Thailand and bring clothes and food for the monks. "THOT KATHIN" ceremonies last one month.
Chulalongkorn, Rama V Day	This is a public holiday day to commemorate the Rama 5 or Chulalongkorn's wise reign over Thailand. Thanks to him, Thailand did not become a French or English colony even if Thailand lost leadership over Lao, Cambodia and the northern provinces of Malaysia. During his reign, Thailand became a modern country.
NOVEMBER	
Loi Krathong Day	Loi Krathong is a religious event which happens every year on the full moon of the 12th lunar month (first full moon day of November). All Thai people buy or make a "KRATHONG". The "krathong" is made of sliced disks of banana-tree stems which are decorated with intricately shaped banana leaves and flowers with a candle, a coin and incense placed in the middle. During the evening, Thai people go to places where there is a river, a pond, or the sea to launch their "KRATHONG". In ancient times, this ceremony was to excuse one-self to the spirit of the river and to let one's sins float away. Little boys are allowed to take the coin when the candle of the krathong is out. An old proverb says that "When a boy and a girl are launching a krathong together they will be lovers in this life or perhaps in their next life".
Primary Education Day	Primary Education Day is observed on the occasion of the death of King Rama VI. On July 1, 1909 King Rama VI founded the Boy Scout Organization. Boy students were asked to be boy scouts, and were trained in patriotism, to keep rules and orders, and to sacrifice themselves for the benefits of the others.
DECEMBER	
H.M. the King's Birthday (also Father's Day)	<p>This public holiday is the day of all the fathers of Thailand. Especially the King Rama IX, honored as the father of all Thai people. This day is the birthday of the current Thai King. All the buildings of Thailand are covered with symbols of the monarchy, the King.</p> <p>Each year in the evening of the 5th December, a free huge concert is organized in "SANAM LUANG", big garden in front of the "WAT PHRA</p>

	<p>KAEW" in Bangkok. It is a great honor for singers to be invited to play one song in the concert dedicated to the King. Some of them sing songs composed by the King himself. Every kind of Thai music is played such as Mor Lam, Thai country music, pop, Disco Dance. Every kind of singer from very old to teenagers participate in order to give satisfaction to the crowd.</p>
Constitution Day	<p>Since 1932 Thailand has been a democracy and this day commemorates the Thai constitution. Before 1932, Thailand was called Siam and was under the total rule of the King. Some say that Thailand is even a better democracy since the army is far from direct power (1992). The king has still limited power, but primarily a moral power over the Thai people which worship him for all its kindness and goodness. Thailand's monarchy is like England, with no true power, a government and no president.</p>
Christmas Day	<p>Christmas is not officially observed in Thailand. However, in places like Patong Beach and other popular tourist destinations Christmas is gaining a very real presence. Santa Claus hats and Christmas trees are seen in increasing amounts and Christmas Eve is filled with music and fun.</p>
New Year's Eve	<p>This public holiday is the last day of the year and is celebrated with great fanfare, fireworks, banquets and toasts.</p>

Appendix E – 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	<p>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).</p> <p>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 2007, Ramadan Sept. 13-Oct. 12.</p> <p>Prayer is an important aspect of the religious life of practicing Muslims, who will generally pray five times each day, at specific</p>	<p>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)</p> <p>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</p> <p>While the prayers typically take no more 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>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Praying does not have to be done in a mosque or temple; a private space can be provided; it is</p>

	<p>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>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 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>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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		Going to church or mosques/ participating in host family's religious services	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.
SOCIAL LIFE AND GENDER ROLES	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.	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.	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 U.S. 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.
COMMUNICATION STYLES	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. Students rely on the context and on nonverbals	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 answers or make excuses instead of saying	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 want to hear.

	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.	"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.	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. When the need for confrontation arises, know that this makes them very uncomfortable and maybe use the help of someone else as mediary (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.
HOUSEHOLD RULES AND FAMILY LIFE	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.	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.	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.
	Time is not as scheduled and	Some students could be late or oversleep.	Students may need some time to adjust to a very

TIME AND SPACE	<p>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>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>time-oriented U.S. 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.</p> <p>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 U.S. 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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