



Handbook for Host Families of Egyptian Participants



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Egyptian Culture Quiz

Perhaps you are already familiar with Egyptian culture. Or maybe you only know only a little. In either case, you should find the following questions interesting. After responding to these questions, check the answers that follow. Whether you got the answers right or wrong, you'll want to read the sections referenced in the answer sheet.

1. An Egyptian student from a small town or city is likely to have a lot in common with a U.S. teen from a small town or city. **True False**
2. "Saving face" is not important to most Egyptians and they are fairly comfortable giving or receiving direct, constructive feedback. **True False**
3. Egyptian parents have a high tolerance for what U.S. parents might call "nagging." **True False**
4. Coptic Christians in Egypt celebrate Christmas on December 25th. **True False**
5. It is common for an Egyptian male to have a say in decisions that impact his sister's life. **True False**
6. The vast majority of Egyptians live along the banks of the Nile where the population density is similar to that of New York or Los Angeles - about 2500 people per square mile. **True False**
7. Your student may not feel comfortable having friends of the opposite sex. **True False**
8. Due to the family-centered life in Egypt, many Egyptian students will hold part-time jobs to help support their family. **True False**
9. Egyptian teens are accustomed to choosing their classes to the same extent that U.S. teens are.
10. Most Egyptian YES students will be accustomed to being able to get a ride from someone on very short notice or take public transportation to their destination. **True False**
11. Egyptians tend to "live in the moment" and this characteristic may have a large impact on your daily life as a host family of an Egyptian student. **True False**
12. Bathroom routines in Egypt are almost identical to those in the typical U.S. household. **True False**
13. Your participant may not be comfortable with a more equitable division of labor between males and females within the household, especially if your participant is male. **True False**
14. All Muslims are Arabs. **True False**
15. Fasting is an integral part of both Christian and Muslim religious celebrations in Egypt. **True False**

Answers to Egyptian Culture Quiz

1. An Egyptian student from a small town or city is likely to have a lot in common with a U.S. teen from a small town or city.
True: Egyptian students from smaller towns will likely be used to more traditional lifestyles than most students coming from Cairo and Alexandria, where most YES students are from (see *Generalizations* and *Stereotypes*).
2. "Saving face" is not important to most Egyptians and they are fairly comfortable giving or receiving direct, constructive feedback.
False: "Saving face," both their own and that of others, is very important to most Egyptians and because of this they would be fairly to extremely uncomfortable giving or receiving direct, constructive feedback (see *Communication* and *Family Life*).
3. Egyptian parents have a high tolerance for what U.S. parents might call "nagging."
True: Egyptian parents generally expect their children to negotiate when it comes to rules, requests and decisions that may impact them (see *Communication*).
4. Coptic Christians in Egypt celebrate Christmas on December 25th.
False: Coptic Christians, who make up about 10% of the population in Egypt, celebrate Christmas on December 7th (see *Family Life* and *Holidays*).
5. It is common for an Egyptian male to have a say in decisions that impact his sister's life.
True: As he matures, a brother takes on a similar role to his sister as does their father; that of protector and decision maker relative to issues that impact her life outside of the home (see *Family Life* and *Gender Roles*).
6. The vast majority of Egyptians live along the banks of the Nile where the population density is similar to that of New York or Los Angeles - about 2500 people per square mile.
False: The vast majority of people do live along the banks of the Nile but the population density averages out at 5000 people per square mile (see *Sense of Space*).
7. Your student may not feel comfortable having friends of the opposite sex.
True: In Egypt close friends can be of the same or opposite sex although friends of the opposite sex are generally not as common among teens (see *Peer Relationships*).
8. Due to the family-centered life in Egypt, many Egyptian students will hold part-time jobs to help support their family.
False: It is highly uncommon for Egyptian teens to hold part-time jobs. While they may help out in the family business or by watching younger siblings, this would be unpaid work. Their "job" is primarily viewed as studying in preparation for university entrance exams that will to a large part determine the course of their professional life (see *Free Time* and *Education*).

9. Egyptian teens are accustomed to choosing their classes to the same extent that U.S. teens are.
False: Egyptian teens have very little choice when it comes to the academic setting and they will need your help in choosing their courses and extra-curricular activities (see *Education* and *Family Life*).
10. Most Egyptian YES students will be accustomed to being able to get a ride from someone on very short notice or take public transportation to their destination.
True: Public transportation is readily available in larger urban centers of Egypt, (where most YES student are from), and most Egyptian participants, especially females, will be accustomed to being driven where they need to go by a family member, friend, driver or taxi, and on relatively short notice. They will likely not be aware of the detailed planning that is often involved in figuring out how to get all members of a typical U.S. family where they need to be on a daily/weekly basis (see *Transportation*, *Family Life* and *Sense of Time*).
11. Egyptians tend to “live in the moment” and this characteristic may have a large impact on your daily life as a host family of an Egyptian student.
True: Egyptian culture is highly influenced by the concept of fate and as such, planning ahead for the near or distant future, is much less common than in the U.S. This potential difference may impact your daily life a great deal (see *Family Life*, *Religion* and *Sense of Time*).
12. Bathroom routines in Egypt are almost identical to those in the typical U.S. household.
False: Many differences exist between bathroom routines in the U.S. and Egypt, ranging from the style of toilet to frequency of bathing or showering (see *Personal Hygiene and Grooming*).
13. Your participant may not be comfortable with a more equitable division of labor between males and females within the household, especially if your participant is male.
True: In the typical Egyptian home the mother is responsible for doing or overseeing most if not all household chores (see *Gender Roles*).
14. All Muslims are Arabs.
False: An Arab is one who speaks Arabic. A Muslim may be of any nationality or ethnic descent just as a Christian may be of any nationality or ethnic descent (see *Religion*).
15. Fasting is an integral part of both Christian and Muslim religious celebrations in Egypt.
True: Coptic Christians may fast up to 210 days per year and Muslims generally fast during the 40 days of Ramadan (see *Religion*).

Foreword

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

Objectives of Handbook

This Handbook for Host Families of Egyptian Participants is dedicated and directed toward you, the host family. You represent one of the indispensable ingredients required for an international exchange program to be successful. The information contained here will also be shared with exchange program support volunteers so that they too will better understand the Egyptian 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. This handbook is designed to help you learn about both the Egyptian **and** U.S. cultures by examining a number of cultural topics in contrast with each other. We hope that you will find these to be especially interesting and informative:

- Predominant communication styles in the U.S.A. and Egypt;
- Egyptian family life and relationships;
- Egyptian cultural norms regarding personal appearance and religion;
- Key differences between the U.S. and Egyptian school systems;
- The general Egyptian and U.S. American views on concepts such as time and space.

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

Introduction

What is Culture?

Cultural 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**.



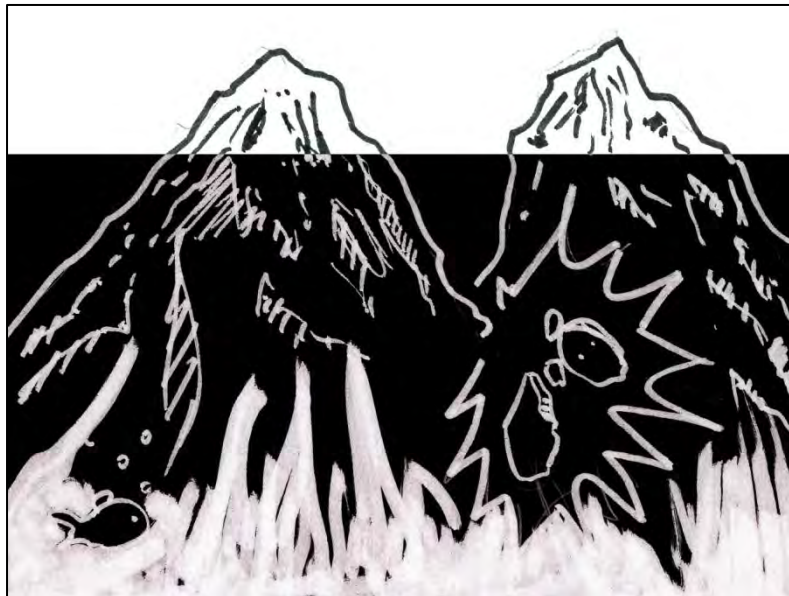
(<http://www.uop.edu/sis/culture/File/sec1-1-1h1.htm>)

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 Egyptian and U.S. culture. This process of mutual enrichment and learning is what thousands of participants, host families, and natural families will tell you is at the heart of the hosting experience.

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

Generalizations and Stereotypes

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



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

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

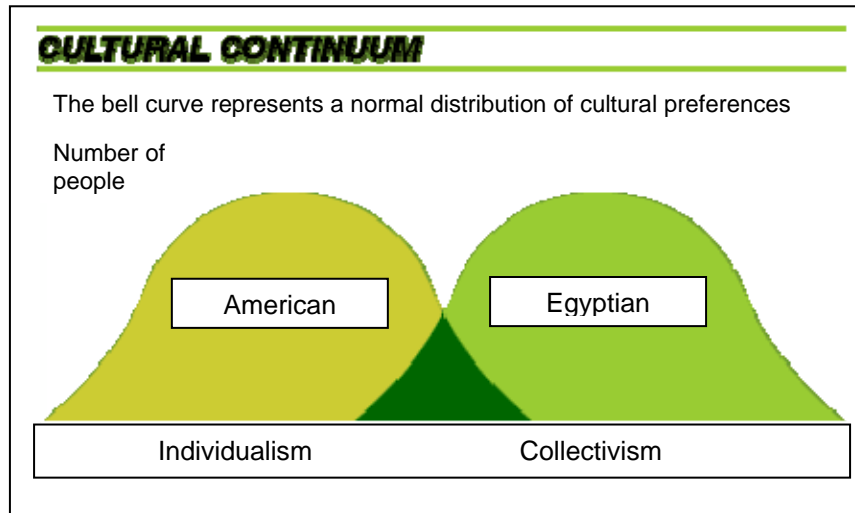


Cultural generalizations must not be confused with cultural stereotypes, which are fixed ideas or exaggerated beliefs about every individual in the culture group. They are often negative in nature and not tested.

An example of a **cultural stereotype** would be *U.S. Americans are materialistic*.

To better understand the difference between cultural generalizations and stereotypes, please refer to the figure on the following page. On the left side, **individualism** (emphasis on well-being of the individual) is displayed and on the right side is the Egyptian 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 confrontation and directly revealing negative feelings as we often do in the U.S. Maintaining harmony within a group is very important in a collectivist culture. Family ties also tend to be stronger than those in individualist cultures (see *Communication*).

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 Egyptian culture but some Egyptian people can be found on the individualist side.



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.

Egyptian students from smaller cities will likely be used to more traditional lifestyles, and tend to be more reserved, conservative and traditional than most students coming from Cairo and Alexandria.

The shaded area shows how some U.S. Americans and Egyptian people may be more like each other on this trait than they are like the average U.S. American or Egyptian person. For example, a U.S. teen from a rural community might have more in common with an Egyptian teen from a rural community than a U.S. teen from an urban area. In fact, you may find that many of the similarities and differences that you and your student may encounter are related to general characteristics of urban versus small town life.

Exchange students tend to be outside the norm for one or more cultural traits in comparison to their peers. It is highly unusual for an Egyptian teen to leave his or her family for a year to study abroad. Similarly, relatively few U.S. families will open their home to a teen from another country. You and your participant are likely to have in common an open-mind and an interest in learning about other cultures, key elements of a successful hosting experience.

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 to or different than those of your participant.

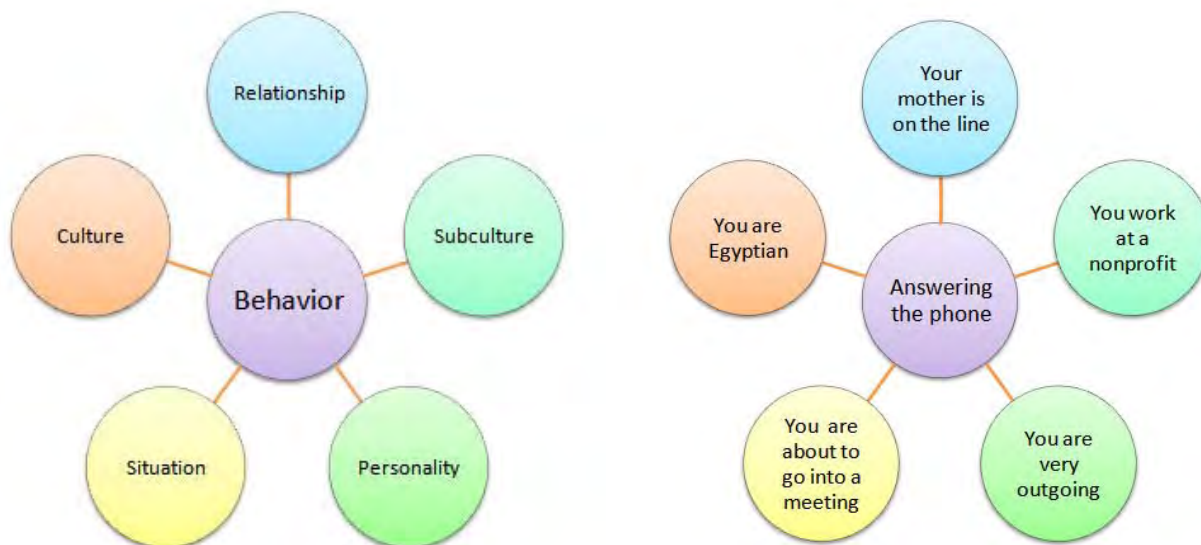


Figure 1
Factors that may influence behaviors

In the above scenario an Egyptian person would most likely take the call and converse with his or her mother for several minutes, (and her colleagues would not object or think it inappropriate) reflecting the strong family ties that are the norm in Egypt (see *Family Life*). Change any factor in this situation and the behavior in the center may change.

While many things can influence one's behavior, cultural generalizations serve as a basis for comparison and exploration of cultural differences and similarities.

Reaching an accurate understanding of the reasons behind any behavior that may seem puzzling or unusual to you (or your participant) will require effective communication between you and your participant. We hope that this handbook will serve as a starting point for this dialogue!

Culture and Perception

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

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



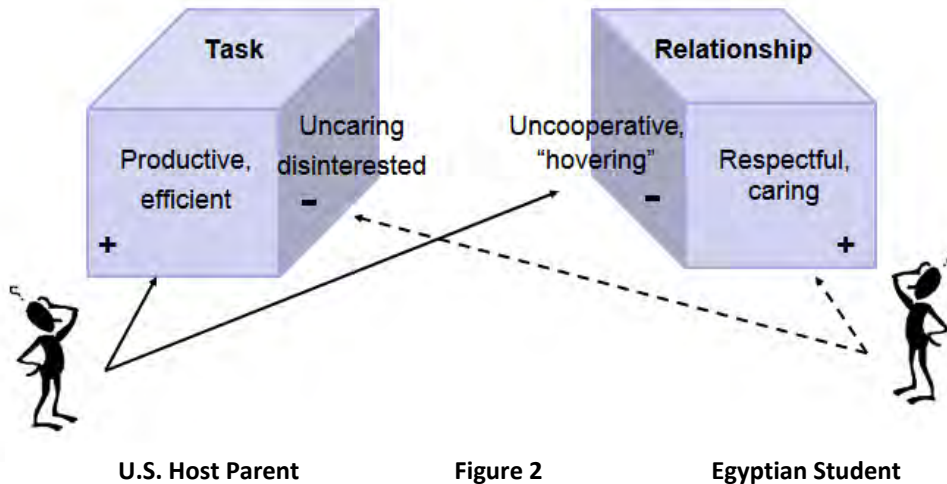
Take for example, the **task** vs. **relationship** value contrast. In general, U.S. Americans tend to view achieving a particular task in a timely manner more important than developing or maintaining a relationship with those who may be involved in helping achieve that task. In the U.S. it is acceptable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

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

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

What happened here? How might the student perceive your behavior, how might you perceive the student’s behavior? Figure 2 provides a likely explanation.

Task vs. Relationship Value Orientation



While other value differences are influencing the situation (see *Family Life, Space and Time*) we will focus on the fact that the host parent is trying to accomplish the task of unloading the groceries so that she can begin making dinner while the student is seeking to connect with her by asking about her day, sharing what happened during his day, and eliciting advice from her. Having “dilly-dallied” and not retrieved the groceries, she perceives his behavior as uncooperative and “hovering.” In contrast, since she did not take the time to chat with him upon her return home, he perceived her behavior as uncaring and disinterested. **Neither the student nor the host parent intended to displease the other, but a lack of understanding of the motivation for the other’s behavior has led to negative perceptions on both sides.**



When misunderstandings occur, seek clarification by exploring cultural differences that may be at play.

You don’t need to change, just explain!

A little flexibility goes a long way.

While a given situation in this handbook may not apply to your family, it is important to be aware of and open to the fact that cultural differences exist. Therefore we encourage you to refer to this handbook as a resource throughout your experience, in order to:

- Increase your awareness of the similarities and differences between U.S. and Egyptian culture;
- Understand the underlying reasons for differences you may encounter;
- Identify ways of dealing with cultural differences that may be challenging to you or your participant.

In doing so we know that both you and your participant will have a more enriching and fun experience!

Overview

When in the U.S. we hear the phrase “old world charm” visions of quaint European villages are likely to come to mind as our founding fathers and many of the first settlers and subsequent wave of immigrants came from Europe. However, when we take a broader, global perspective of the term “old world” we see that Egyptian civilization is amongst the oldest of the “old world” dating back over 5000 years (see *A Brief History of Egypt* in Appendix). In contrast, the U.S. is amongst the newest of the “new world” with only a few hundred years in existence.



Despite a succession of different governing bodies, Egyptians have maintained many of the customs and traditions that have long been part of their civilization: elements of religion, the arts and sciences and an emphasis on strong family ties, continue to influence society today. We have ancient Egyptians to thank for 365 day calendar and 24-hour day, ink and paper, glass and the last remaining ancient wonder of the world – the pyramids.

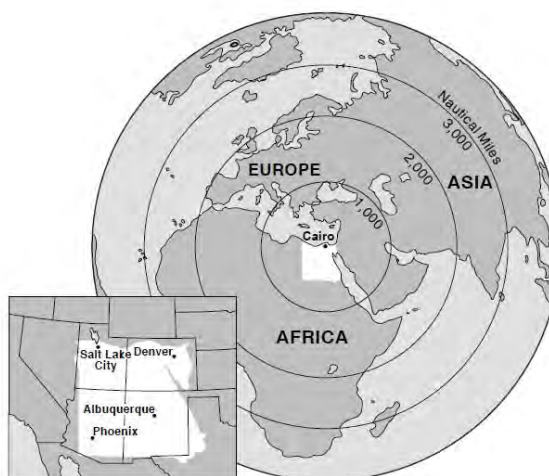


Egyptian students tend to feel and express great pride in their country. This may be misperceived by family members and friends. Keep in mind they do not intend to be boastful but have been raised to be very proud of their Egyptian history, culture and the many important contributions made by Egyptians to global civilization.

Modern Egypt is a reflection of this history. You will find every modern convenience in the large cities of Cairo and Alexandria. Egypt is known as a cultural hub for the Arab world. Its long literary tradition boasts many famous writers, including the Nobel Prize winning novelist, Naguib Mahfouz. It has a robust Arabic language film and television industry and an eclectic and diverse music scene rooted in its own great classical music tradition. Tourism is one of the biggest industries, along with the production and export of textiles, chemicals, petroleum and minerals.

Geography

Egypt is located in northeastern Africa. It is the twelfth largest country in Africa. It is largely desert and receives little rain. The Nile flows from southern Egypt to the Nile Delta in the north and into the Mediterranean Sea. The Nile valley is highly fertile and 98 percent of the Egyptian population lives along the Nile. 20% of the population lives in Cairo (see Appendix).



The Nile is the world's longest river and flows from two lakes south of the Equator northward through Egypt. Upon reaching the delta, the Nile splits into many branches, creating a fan like shape by the time it reaches the Mediterranean Sea. The Eastern or Arabia Desert stretches eastward from the Nile River to the Red Sea coast. The western desert covers two-thirds of Egypt. This area is largely uninhabited other than six major oases. The Sinai Peninsula is a barren desert, and is considered part of Asia rather than Africa.

Climate

Egypt has a hot and arid climate. Temperatures depend on the area of the country and can reach as high as 120° in the Western Desert or 104° near the Nile Valley in the summer. Coastal cities near the Mediterranean usually do not rise above 90° in the summer and the Mediterranean breeze keeps the climate pleasant. In Cairo, winter may bring temperatures as low as 48°. Cairo has an average of five or fewer days of rain a year, and Siwa, and oases in the Western desert, may only see rain once a century.

All YES participants have a stipend to purchase cold weather clothing. Egyptian students are not used to wearing a lot of clothing. In very cold climates, give explicit directions to your students as to how to dress, covering face, in layers, etc.



Students placed in less sunny/colder areas of the U.S. may find themselves feeling down due to the change in climate. Encouraging them to engage in physical activity may help boost their mood, even if it is just going for a walk outside.

Some students may want to raise the temperature in their bedroom to simulate the climate in Egypt. Explain to them that this is not acceptable because of the cost of the heat.

Communication

Miscommunications and misunderstandings regularly occur between native speakers of the same language, including family members and friends. Insert a non-native speaker into the mix and the likelihood of this type of incident increases. For this reason, one of the first topics covered in this handbook is communication. Host family members and participants will both benefit greatly from awareness of similarities and differences in the ways that they communicate.

Indirect and Direct Communication Styles

In U.S. culture the communication style is influenced by the fact that relationships are typically more transient and efficiency is generally valued over safeguarding against disappointment. In Egyptian culture relationships are typically close and long term and taking great care not to damage these relationships is central to Egyptian communication (see *Generalizations and Stereotypes* and *Family Life*). Situations that might be uncomfortable for the other speaker are known in advance and respected. Egyptians will not generally share disappointments openly. Negative responses are not directly communicated and are frequently expressed by offering an alternative without comment on the original issue. These behaviors are all characteristics of an **indirect** style of communication.



Direct communication is like “reading the headlines.”

Indirect communication is like “reading between the lines.”

In general, U.S. Americans consider themselves direct in their communication style. A **direct** style of communication is one in which the meaning of what is said is found primarily in the words that are spoken. We like to think of ourselves as “telling it like it is.” In an **indirect** style of communication, the meaning is more often derived from factors other than what is said. Some of the factors that can influence the meaning could be:

- the perceived status of the speakers;
- the context of the situation;
- body language;
- or, a combination of these, and other factors.

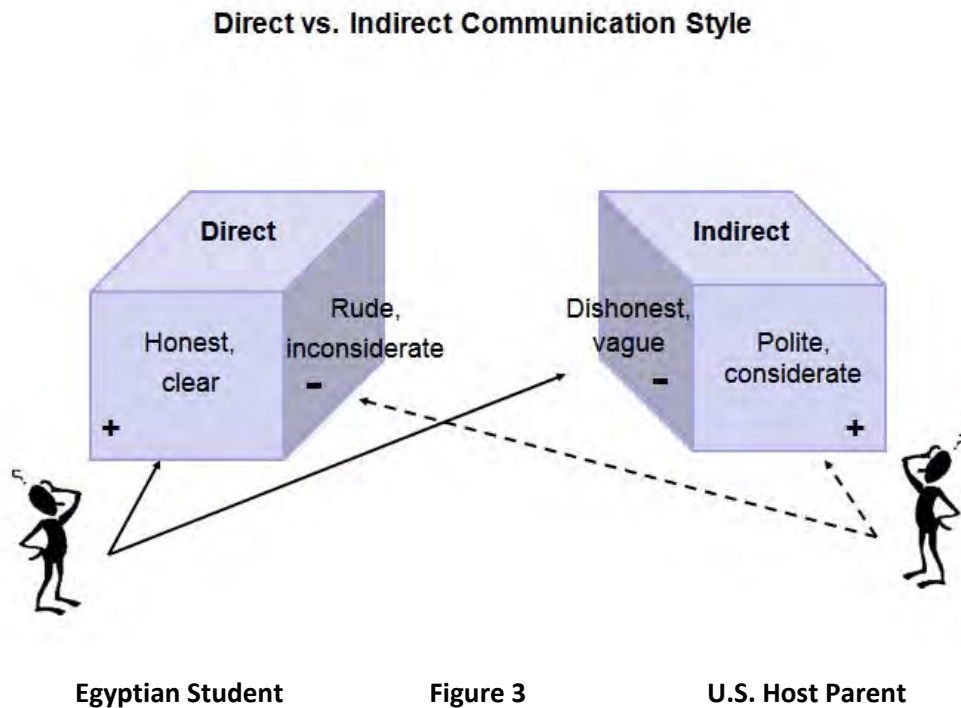


Though communication styles vary among host families in the U.S., Egyptian students will tend to use a more indirect communication style than most host families use. This can cause discomfort and misunderstanding to both parties unless it is discussed and an attempt is made to understand the different styles.

Imagine you are having coffee at the home of a friend. The kitchen window is open and you feel chilly. Which are you more likely to do?

- a) Ask your friend “Is it OK to close the window? I am a little cold.”
- b) Say with sincerity “My, what a nice, fresh breeze.”

To get their message across in a culturally appropriate way, most people in the U.S. would choose the first option and most people in Egypt would choose the second option. This is a simple example of the direct vs. indirect style of communicating.



Correcting Your Egyptian Student

Because of this difference in communication style, a U.S. host parent who is accustomed to directly pointing out the error of his or her child's ways (*You left your shoes in the hall again! How many times do I have to tell you to turn off the light when you leave a room?*), may be perceived as inconsiderate by their Egyptian student and/or may lead the student to believe that the parent is very angry with the student.



To avoid causing hurt feelings early on in the experience, tell your student that your more direct way of explaining things is meant to help him or her learn how to do things in the home, at school, etc. and that it does not mean that you are angry. You may also wish to frame your corrections in more subtle ways and/or enlist the help of host siblings to get your message across.

The “three no’s” Rule

Host mother: *Would you like a piece of pie?*

Egyptian student: *No, thank you.*

Host mother: *Are you sure you wouldn’t like a piece of pie?*

Egyptian student: *No, I really shouldn’t.*

Host mother: *Wouldn’t you like just a little piece?*

Egyptian student: *It looks delicious. A little piece would be fine.*

While it would be unlikely for the U.S. host mom to offer three times, this is what the Egyptian student will probably expect from the host mother. By not accepting right away, the student is being polite and waiting to see if the offer is just a courtesy or is genuine. For the Egyptian student it would be considered rude or selfish to accept on the first or second offer, even if the pie is very tempting and the student is very hungry. Encouraging the guests to eat is expected of a good host or hostess. Refusing at first and then being won over by the hosts insistence is a common ritual in Egypt.

When our student first got here, there were a couple of circumstances where he was asked if he wanted something - a second hamburger at a cookout (he was starving) and a night out at the movies with some teammates (he was anxious to make friends). He declined, so he didn't get what he wanted. After some discussion, we realized that in his culture, it is rude to say yes until asked 3 times. We explained that “no” means “no” in the US.

U.S. Host Family



When our hosted student wishes to make a request, he often says, "I don't know if it's OK or not...." or "I don't know if I should ask you or not..." Once he feels he has our permission that it's OK to just say what is on his mind, he communicates very well.

U.S. Host Family

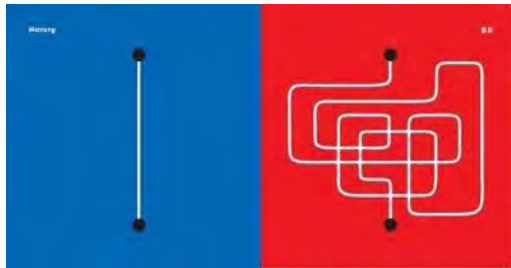
The differences were what you would expect trying to incorporate anyone into your family . I suggest being completely honest and open right from the beginning. You can even explain what your style of communication is and say that offense is never intended and to please just say something to us if you think you have misread something.

U.S. Host Family



Host families will want to listen carefully and assist their student in developing a more direct style as appropriate so their needs can be more readily understood. This may take the form of direct coaching in the early weeks after arrival, and certainly from modeling the communication style that your family finds most comfortable.

Linear and Circular Communication Styles



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Generally, U.S. Americans have a very linear style of communication and Egyptians have a circular style of communication. A **linear** style of communication gets to the point without any detours. Think of this style as developing along a straight line with A going to B, going to C, until the point is made. With a **circular** style of communication the point of the conversation is rarely stated outright. Instead, the conversation might get to the point in a roundabout way, for example, through the telling of elaborate stories and anecdotes and care is taken not to relay information in any way that could cause upset, whether that be giving someone bad news, turning down an invitation, refusing a request or any other such matter.

In their communications Egyptians strive to protect their own and the other person's face, as well as maintain harmonious relationships, and getting their point across in a round-about manner helps to do both. Story telling is another way used to convey information or advice that would otherwise not be given in a more direct manner.

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



Reassure your student that it is OK to make a direct request and be sensitive to how difficult it will be for your student to communicate in a more direct manner. It is important to recognize and praise any efforts he or she makes to do so.

Refusal Styles

In Egypt it is considered impolite to deny a wish to someone. Instead of saying "no", other phrases are used to describe an inconvenience, which implies that the answer is no. When an Egyptian says "yes," he or she may actually mean "possibly" and the true meaning of the response may be communicated with body language, silence, and vague words or phrases.

Initially it will be very difficult for your student to directly refuse the invitation or request of another. When students first arrive they may feel inclined to be overly respectful in their communication with family, particularly with those they perceive of higher status, such as adults in the family or in the community. This dynamic may make your student appear to be less than truthful, and may even be

misinterpreted as dishonesty. The following is an example of how this may play out during the hosting experience.

A U.S. host mother asked her Egyptian son whether he wanted to attend a barbeque at the home of a neighbor that afternoon. The student replied that he was not feeling well and would prefer to stay home. The host mother left the son at home and told him to call her on her cell phone if he started to feel worse. Thirty minutes after arriving at the barbeque, the host mother got a call from her host son asking if he could go to a movie with friends that afternoon. Frustrated and with a slightly angry tone, she replied, "No, if you are not feeling well, you need to stay home." He replied, "Oh, but I am feeling better now. Please may I go with my friends?" To which the host mother replied sternly, "No, we'll talk more about this when I get home."

In the U.S. a mother would likely have taken her child's statement of not feeling well at "**face value**" or in other words, accept it as a truthful statement, as chances are, if the child did not want to go to the barbeque, he would have "Just said no." And in the event that the child was actually just saying he didn't feel well as an excuse not to attend the barbeque, he would know better than to call up his mom 30 minutes later and ask if could go to the movies!

In contrast, an Egyptian mother would take the same reply as "**saving face**" or a polite way of refusing the invitation without challenging her authority. Furthermore, she would not have been offended if she had received the same call thirty minutes after arriving at her neighbor's house.



The BIG difficulty we had with our child was truthfulness - he had a very different sense of truth. He would say whatever came into his head, or what would sound better (on his application - activities- swimming, basketball - flunked the swim test for crew, couldn't play basketball), etc. We later learned sometimes it was embarrassment (He didn't have a camera so he didn't know where he went in DC - so he said he stayed in the hotel for meetings and only went to Union station). Zillions of examples. It didn't particularly bother us, but we never knew what to believe. It eventually got better, but it was VERY significant.

U.S. Host Family



Remind your student repeatedly that it is acceptable to directly refuse an offer or request by simply saying "No, thank you." Be mindful to state your requests as requests, not as questions, otherwise you may find "Would you like to set the table for dinner?" just might get a "No, thank you" in response! Instead say, "Please set the table for dinner."

In the previous example, the student's persistence after being told "no" to going to a movie with his friends highlights another characteristic that is common to the Egyptian style of communication. This characteristic has been referred to as "bargaining," and "negotiating" however, the closest translation we have come up with relative to the U.S./Egyptian hosting experience is "nagging."

“Nagging”

In Egypt it is very common for children to request something of their parents repeatedly until they get the answer they want. This back and forth is actually expected by parents and is often carried out in a playful and humorous, yet skillful and strategic manner. Negotiating skills are valued in Egyptian culture, whether at the market, in a business transaction or among friends, and as with most cultural attributes, the first place these skills are learned is in the home.

As you can imagine, this style of communication is often not well received in the U.S. where “No means no” and a price tag is a price tag, a rule is a rule, etc. and may be perceived in a negative light.



Huge difference is that I make most of the child-centered decisions in this family, and my husband and I consult often. Our host child spent months trying to get around me when I said no (e.g. I said he could not buy a computer until a month before he went home, and only with parents' permission.) He tried to get my husband to override this, or his AFS liaison, or his mother. Often, he did not believe what I said or would disagree and suggest that what his friends said was correct.

U.S. Host Family



It would be helpful to listen thoughtfully to your host son or daughters’ arguments before giving the final answer to a request and to always explain the reasons behind your decision. Doing so will show your respect and care for the student and it will allow the student to learn from the experience.

Attached and Detached Communication Styles

Communication styles can also be described by the manner in which people speak. Egyptians generally have what is often described as an **attached** style of communicating. Though we just described how they use an *indirect* communication style with a lot of non-verbal cues and obscured meanings, they can also be expected to use an attached style that may make them appear to be arguing.

The attached style can be described as speaking loudly, in an animated way with lots of gestures, and frequently interrupting others. Those who are communicating in that fashion feel it shows interest in the person speaking and their own engagement in the conversation. Many U.S. Americans, who tend to have a more **detached** communication style, characterized by a lower volume of voice and fewer gestures, may perceive this style as argumentative and somewhat aggressive and are generally uncomfortable with it.



Our child had difficulty making friends - and we considered that part of the problem was communication style. With peers he was loud and boastful -- which just doesn't go over well with New England kids.

U.S. Host Family



Explain to your student that we generally show respect to and interest in a speaker by allowing them to finish speaking before we respond. Explain to them that raising their voice and interrupting may be perceived in a negative light by others such as peers, teachers and relatives.

Conflict Resolution

In the U.S. often if two family members or friends have what we consider a heated argument and no resolution is achieved, it will take time for the relationship to normalize and/or it will only normalize once appropriate apologies have been made. In Egypt, this is generally not the case. After a heated argument, two people will likely carry on as if nothing has happened. This is due in part to the attached communication style and in part to the collective nature of Egyptian society where it is important to maintain harmony in the relationship.



He was very social and verbal, and had a great (yet not always funny) sense of humor. He was raised in a very traditional conservative Muslim family, so clearly there were things that he wasn't used to talking about like sex, girls, abortion etc...but he was really curious and pretty open, so by the end we were able to talk about pretty much anything. As his host sister, however, I knew he always felt a little strange talking to me about these things.

U.S. Host Sister

Non-Verbal Communication

Greetings: Boys may greet other boys with a handshake using the right hand (the left hand is considered disrespectful). Girls may greet their female friends with a hug or kiss. A male will not shake the hand of a female unless she offers it to him first.

Eye Contact: Egyptians may make and hold eye contact for long periods of time in order to read the emotions and responses of the other party in the discussion. However, when speaking to elders or person's of authority, Egyptian children will avert their eyes as a sign of respect. This can cause misunderstanding as the norm in the U.S. is to look the speaker in the eye, especially when conversing with a parent, teacher or other person of authority.

Initially, your student may feel uncomfortable maintaining eye contact with someone from the opposite sex.



Remind your student that is important to maintain eye contact with his or her teachers, coaches and other adults when speaking to them.

If your student will not look you in the eye while you are sharing information or family plans, double check the way you are communicating to see if it could be misperceived by your student as a reprimand.

Feet: Among Egyptians it is improper to allow the sole of one's foot to point at another person as the foot is seen unclean. Similarly, in Egypt a person does not place feet on chairs, desks, or tables and any place where food may be prepared or served.



Egyptian students are likely to be surprised and possibly offended if a classmate places his or her feet on their desk or chair at school. Explain to your student that this behavior is not unusual and tell them how they may politely express their desire for the classmate to remove his or her feet.

If you get an unexpected (either a laugh or shocked look) response to an expression or gesture, ask your student to explain what this expression of gesture means to him or her. It can be a fun game if your student will do the same.

Taking the time to explain some of the cultural differences in gestures may help your student feel more comfortable and may help avoid misinterpretation. Most of the time the "offense" that your student might perceive is unintentional and is simply due to another way of viewing the world. Your explanations and demonstrations of caring and interest will go a long way in helping your student to feel comfortable. It is the responsibility of the host parents and older siblings to be available, to listen, and to share, in order to facilitate communication with the student.



Host parents may want to check with the school to be sure that differences in communication style are not negatively impacting their student's communication with teachers and/or coaches.

Language Ability



Communication can be a problem—either because of language difficulties - or because they are a teenager.

U.S. Host Family

We played games and our student said Apples to Apples really helped him learn the language.

U.S. Host Family

Students will arrive with a range of English language skills, from competent to struggling. It may take a host family some time to decide whether it is a misunderstanding due to language ability, or misunderstanding due to being a teenager!

Particularly with an indirect style, your student may just nod and smile in agreement and not admit to having difficulty understanding what is being said. Your student may not even realize that he or she does not fully understand. Host families need to encourage language learners, especially in the first few months, and realize that language skills will continue to develop throughout the student's stay in the U.S.



Try to avoid teasing, irony and sarcasm as such they are often misinterpreted or misunderstood by students, especially early on in the experience when their language skills are less developed.

Sensitive Topics

In the U.S. it is more the family structure which determines who discusses issues or sensitive topics within the home. In Egypt, when discussing a personal or sensitive topic or issue, a woman would speak with a girl, and a man with a boy. Mothers would not speak about personal issues with a boy. Please be aware of this as you may in-advertently cause your student embarrassment (see *Personal Hygiene* and *Grooming*).

Food and Mealtimes

Food is often one of the very first items of “culture” that we think of when focusing on another country. Food, in addition to providing nutrition, comes with traditions, associations and emotional components, along with specific flavor combinations and preparations.

The Egyptian diet and meal patterns are quite different from those in the U.S. Egyptian foods are a combination of flavors from many Mediterranean countries and ingredients such as tomatoes, tahini, mint, coriander, cumin, onions, eggplant, chicken and lamb are prominent in the typical Egyptian diet. Food, as in most cultures, is also an important part of hospitality.

Breakfast may consist of beans, bread, along with cheeses, falafel, cold cuts, pickled vegetables and eggs. Sometimes meat and fish are served. The bread *aish* is a flat unleavened bread similar to pita. Coffee, mango juice, or guava juice is usually served with breakfast. Families will typically eat a large breakfast on Friday, a holy day and the first full weekend day.

Lunch is the main meal of the day and eaten between the hours of 2:00pm and 5:00pm. During the school year it is eaten after school. Rice is usually served with the meats, vegetables or beans with sauces. Salads and bread are also served.

Dinner is usually the smallest meal of the day. Typical foods include yogurt, cheese, bread, fruits, and milk.

Snacking in Egypt is ongoing, whether at work or school. Portion sizes in Egypt tend to be large. Egyptian mothers like to feed their family members well.

Etiquette and Table Manners

Newspaper is often used as a table covering because it is common to eat chicken and fish with one’s fingers and to discard unwanted pieces next to one’s plate. When the meal is over some Egyptian families require children request permission to leave the table. Egyptians also consider it polite to refuse at first when something is offered. Traditionally, food is offered three times (see *Communication*).



Egyptian families tend to eat in a more communal way, often eating out of a shared bowl or dish. For this reason your student may reach across the table rather than asking for something to be passed to him or her.

Explain the proper etiquette in your family, and what is meant by the term “double dipping.” Remind your student about the importance of not “double dipping” when attending a party or family gathering.

Foods Restrictions



My Muslim student did not eat pork at meal time. We learned to always check about pork products being in things we ate.
US Host Family

In Islam, pork and pork products are forbidden. This may present problems for Egyptian exchange students as many U.S. American breakfast foods contain pork, such as sausage and bacon. Other pork products include pepperoni, baked bean, hot dogs, and products that contain gelatin such as marshmallows. Alcohol is also forbidden in Islam.



Discuss with your student their degree of religiosity and their food preferences and restrictions.

Foods marked “Halal” and “Kosher” are approved under Islamic dietary guidelines. Your local grocery store may have a Halal and/or Kosher section, if not, try extending your search to a nearby international food market.

Holidays and Food

Celebrations in Egypt include *Ramadan*, *Eid*, Easter, and Christmas, celebrated on December 7th by Coptic Christians. Food is at the center of these celebrations. During the month of Ramadan Muslims are required to fast from sunrise to sunset. This is a very special time for students so here are some suggestions to help make the fasting easier and the time special (see *Religion* and *Family Life*).

During Ramadan invite friends over and/or arrange to have the family dinner together at sunset. Serve traditional Egyptian food prepared with the help of your student along with your meal to make this time special for both the student and the rest of your family.



During Ramadan, students will be up early to “break-fast.” Back home, this is a meal that is sometimes shared with friends or families. Having a family member join them for breakfast will mean a lot to the student. Make sure that food is available before dawn so the students can eat at the appropriate time.

Although your family may not want to fast with your student, a Muslim student will likely be pleased if one or more members of the family decide to fast with him or her for a day or two.

Family Life

Whoever leaves his home, loses his prestige

One's prestige is among people who know him/her

The collective nature of Egyptian culture is reflected by the importance of family in Egypt where family ties are typically stronger and more numerous than in the U.S. (see *Generalizations and Stereotypes* and *Communication*). For Egyptians, the word “family” means not only the nuclear family (father, mother and children) but extends also to grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and cousins of cousins. Life in Egypt revolves around family and family concerns often assume greater significance than business relationships. For example, it would not be uncommon for someone to cancel a business meeting because some family matter took greater precedence.

In Egypt, the actions of one family member impact the reputation of all family members. For this reason, family members concern themselves intimately with the actions of all family members. Honor has many implications in Egyptian life. It is a code of integrity, dignity and pride. Egyptians demonstrate pride and honor for their religious, political, social and historic heritage – i.e. their culture. Feelings of honor are expressed in everyday language and demeanor. For example, most Egyptians are highly concerned with demonstrating their hospitality and generosity. Dignity and pride express themselves in all aspects of dress, manners, language, attitudes and behavior. As such, honor and shame are two core concepts within the family and community.

One's actions and behaviors will directly affect the family's status and image within the community, potentially bringing honor or shame to other family members. Therefore, a person's decisions and behavior are expected to take into account the repercussions they may inflict upon the entire family/community. As an example, if a daughter was going to a family function and was underdressed, the mother would ask for her to go change. For if she didn't change, the relatives would not comment directly to the daughter but rather criticize the mother for the daughter's lack of proper behavior.



Egyptians usually spend more time socializing with friends and family, going out to dinner or the movies, shopping, watching television etc, than on individual pursuits.

Daily Life

As Egyptian tradition fosters extended family ties, many family members may live in one building owned by the family. It is not uncommon to find three generations of a family living in the same dwelling, whether rural or urban. A family may purchase several flats in the same building, have a villa with separate areas for individual families or even live in one flat with separate rooms for individual families. This tradition provides both financial and emotional support for its members and is very different from the norm in U.S. From an Egyptian point of view, the closer the family can live together, the better.



It sometimes takes me 30 minutes to get outside of my building for I have to stop and talk to all my relatives that I see.
Egyptian Host Mother

As in the U.S., during the week family members schedules vary greatly, which makes it difficult to gather for meals. Sometimes families manage to only gather for the last meal of the day, which may be as late as midnight (see *Food and Mealtimes*). Families commonly meet at the grandparents' home to share a meal together during weekend or vacations.

Napping after school is common for Egyptian teens, especially in the summer to avoid the heat and to prepare for the late nights. A mid-afternoon nap used to be a common practice among adults as well but the work day has extended in recent years making an afternoon *siesta* impossible for many working adults, especially in urban centers.

Night Life

Most Egyptians go to bed very late, especially during summer and holidays, when families may spend evenings together at social clubs, friends' homes, or public, outdoor spaces. During the summer midday heat people tend to stay inside and go out at night when it has cooled down. Family members look forward to and feel connected during these gatherings.

Although Egyptians tend to be nocturnal, most young people have an early curfew that parents enforce if they are not with the family. In general boys are allowed to stay out later and more often than girls. Girls may be out later if they are with the family or an older male family member (related to saving face and safety); families often stay out even later than usual during Ramadan.

Importance of Religious Holidays

In Egypt Christian and Muslim Egyptian families gather during special religious occasions such as Ramadan and Christmas. Among Coptic Christians in Egypt Christmas is celebrated on December 7 and Ramadan, celebrated by Muslims, takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. (The Islamic lunar calendar is about eleven days shorter than the western calendar so religious holidays differ from year to year. Please check www.islamicfinder.com for specific dates and prayer times for the month of Ramadan.) During this holy month, the month in which the Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Mohammed, all able-bodied, post pubescent Muslims are required to fast (no food or drink) from sun up to sun down. These holidays are highly regarded by many Egyptians because of how they bring family and friends together.

During Ramadan families tend to gather for the sunset meal *Iftar* (Break-Fast) and only some families gather for the late night meal *Suhoor* which could be between 2:00 and 3:00 a.m. (a couple hours before sunrise), before starting the fast again at dawn. The *Eid* of Fast-Breaking occurs at the end of the month of fasting. The *Eid* of Sacrifice is in remembrance of the sacrifice by the Prophet Abraham of his son. This is a time of much rejoicing and celebration (see *Religion* and the *YES Cultural Tip Sheet* in the Appendix).



During Ramadan, many Muslims do not eat, drink or smoke between sunrise and sunset. It will be helpful to have foods prepared and stored in the refrigerator for your student to eat outside of these times.

Celebrate the *Eid* of Fast-Breaking by making a special meal and inviting over family and friends to observe the end of Ramadan.

Parent and Child Relationship

A goose's child is an excellent diver

Like father, like son

While still in a position of authority, in many families in U.S. parents see themselves on more equal footing with their teens that do Egyptian parents, to the extent that U.S. teens and parents may consider each other friends. This kind of relationship between parents and teens in Egypt is uncommon. As a patriarchal society, the father holds a position of great responsibility in the family and is highly respected (see *Gender Roles*). The mother is also a highly respected member of the family in that she is traditionally responsible for the upbringing of the children and the care of the home, the behavior of the children is seen as reflection of her abilities as a mother. Egyptian mothers are very attentive to the needs of their families, teaching their children to be respectful and preserve the norms and traditions of the culture.



Some males may not be used to taking instruction from females or may feel uncomfortable in a female dominated household. The host father may need to take the lead in advising a male student.

Egyptian children depend upon their parents and expect a lot of advice and support from them on a daily basis. They will ask their parents for input on small and large decisions related to school, relationships, finances, family matters, etc. seeking approval of their choices.



Students may not be used to being independent and doing things on their own. By giving a lot of direction and guidance at the beginning and gradually giving them less direction, they will become more comfortable with making decisions on their own.

Discipline

In keeping with the Egyptian communication style, the manner in which parents discipline their children is also less direct than how most U.S. parents do. Many rules are unspoken and direct orders are rarely given. For example, if a son or daughter is pestering a parent for permission to do something, and parent responds, "Do what you want." the child will understand this to mean the opposite or "Don't you even think about doing it!" This is a typical expression of discipline.

While a child is usually punished for breaking a rule or upsetting a parent, if the child recognizes his or her mistake and apologizes, he or she is often forgiven and there would be no punishment. If the child were not forgiven, he or she would keep nagging and talking to different members of the family in an attempt to have the punishment removed (see *Communication*).



It is very important that if your student is grounded or receives some kind of temporary suspension of privileges as a form of discipline, you reassure them that the restriction doesn't mean you continue to be angry at them for the duration of the punishment. In their mind, if they have apologized and you are speaking to them, then the "punishment" must be over or if the punishment continues they must not be forgiven and you must still be angry with them!

When being disciplined by a parent or elder an Egyptian student will likely avoid eye contact because of his or her feelings of shame. It would be hard for an Egyptian student look a U.S. parent in the eye under similar circumstances and this should not be taken as a sign of disrespect.

Sibling Relationship

In Egypt, siblings are generally very close, but as with siblings the world over, they do have disagreements. Same sex siblings share things such as clothes, a bathroom and bedrooms. They may also have the same friends.

A boy would be protective of his sisters and has a similar kind of authority in relation to her as his father does. For example, he could advise on the clothes she wears and the friends she chooses.



If your male student offers unwelcome advice to a host sister early on in the experience, discuss with him the roles of family members in his family and yours. This will address the issue in a face saving manner and show that you are interested in learning about his family and culture.

Having a similar aged host brother or sisters can be very helpful to your student especially in the beginning. The host sibling can introduce the student to his or her friends; show the student around school and the community and share insight on teenage life in the U.S. However, we recommend that the exchange student not rely too heavily on similarly aged siblings. There is a chance that they might not have the same interests or get along well enough to become best friends. This is normal and if it happens, the exchange student and/or siblings shouldn't feel disappointed; in your own family your children are not necessarily "best friends" either.



To encourage good relationships with all family members, set up weekly "family time" to encourage interaction between all family members and the student. During this time it can be helpful to organize board games, art projects, a scavenger hunt or other fun activities that facilitate teamwork and discussion.



Having a new member in your family, especially one from a culture in which the children are accustomed to receiving a lot of care and attention from their mother may cause feelings of jealousy in your own children. A way to help avoid this would be to include your children in efforts to help the student adjust; seek their advice, take questions to them and let them know your feelings.

In the U.S. objects or belongings that we generally consider for individual use only, may be considered as belonging to all family members in Egypt. To help avoid misunderstandings, explain to your student the importance of asking to use something, particularly if it is in another person's room (see *Space*).



Our Egyptian son's English was not that good when he arrived so my daughter was correcting him. He was very offended/insulted that his sister and not I or his host dad was correcting his English.

U.S. Host Family

Sense of Space

Our sense of space is not something that we often stop to consider; it is one of those cultural characteristic "below the surface of the water" (see *What is Culture?*). As U.S. Americans, if someone stands too close to us during conversation, we usually step back without thinking. When we enter an elevator, we face the doors instead of facing the others in the car. When we take a seat anywhere in public, space permitting, we will generally choose a seat that has an open space on either side. These choices, conscious or not, are influenced in great part by the culture in which we grew up. This section describes differences between the U.S. and Egyptian concepts of space and how they may impact your hosting experience.

Living Space

The vast size of the U.S. and relatively large amount of physical space available to the average U.S. citizen contribute to our norms and beliefs about space today. Many things in the U.S. are often bigger than they are in other cultures, including Egypt, ranging from the size of our food portions to our refrigerators, washing machines, closets and cars!



Typical Egyptian Refrigerator

While Egypt is slightly larger than the states of Texas and California combined, the overall population density of Egypt is over twice that of the USA, thus making closer quarters for most. However, due to the desert conditions which make much of the country inhabitable, **the vast majority of Egyptians live along the banks of the Nile River where the population density is one of the highest in the world** and in excess of 5,000 people per square mile! In comparison, the population density of Los Angeles and New York are only about half as many people per square mile. Imagine what daily life would be like if you lived in such close proximity to so many other people, buildings, cars, etc!



A typical U.S. Home flanked by typical homes in Egypt

Good fences make good neighbors. – U.S. Proverb

Choose the neighbor before the house. – Egyptian Proverb



The majority of Egyptian students come from Cairo and Alexandria and are used to living in much closer proximity to people and things than the majority of U.S. host families, especially those who live in suburban or rural areas.

Your student will likely be used to sharing his or her room with a sibling and may initially be uncomfortable having his or her own room. If this is the case, be sensitive to your student's need to seek out others in the home so as not to feel lonely.

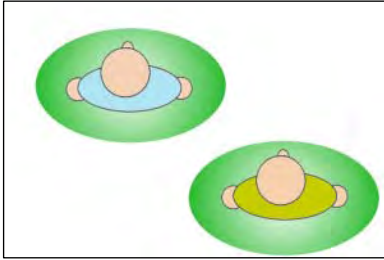
While your student may be used to spending a long time commuting from place to place on a daily basis (see *Transportation*), lengthy trips are more likely to be due to traffic jams than number of miles traveled. Some students have commented that the type of scenery between point A and B (mountains, farms, fields, forests, etc.) actually contributed to their feelings of loneliness while in the U.S.



Egyptian students may have a hard time gauging the time (and fuel) needed to travel from point A to B, especially in small towns or rural areas. This may result in some surprising but truly sincere questions such as, "Can we drive to Disneyworld?", when you live in Minnesota!

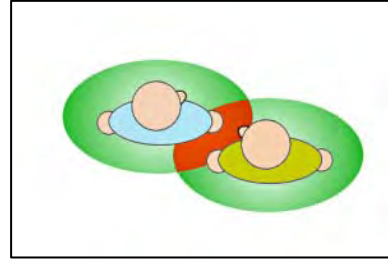
Help your student get oriented to the area by pointing out your town, state, etc. on a map or an online program such as Google Earth.

Personal Space



Two people not affecting each other's personal space.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_space



Reaction of two people whose personal space is in conflict

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_space

The size of our “**personal space bubble**,” or the comfort zone between one person and another, differs by culture and is also influenced by our gender and relationship to others.



Egyptians of the same sex generally have a much smaller personal space bubble than U.S. Americans of the same sex.

In general, it is common for same-sex teens in Egypt to be very close to each other and even touching when talking, sitting or standing. This behavior would not be indicative of any romantic interest in each other. While this level of closeness is becoming more common among non-romantic, same-sex peers, in the U.S., here it is generally reserved for opposite sex peers who share a romantic relationship.



Typical personal space between opposite sex friends in Egypt



Typical personal space between a couple in Egypt (with same sex peers in background)



Typical personal space between male friends in Egypt



Explain to your host daughter that it would be common for a male friend in the U.S. to offer his female peers a friendly hug upon meeting or a supportive hug if she were feeling down. This kind of hug does not usually mean that he wants a romantic relationship with her.



Remind your student that being very close to, touching or leaning on same sex peers is not very common among U.S. teens and may make his or her new friends uncomfortable.

To avoid misunderstandings or misperceptions, take time to observe and point out to your student what is acceptable/unacceptable personal space behavior. This can also be a fun activity for host-siblings.



We had a boy and at first I think he confused friendliness from the girls with romantic interest in him. He respected them though and soon adjusted.

U.S Host Family

Space among Family Members

The distance between family members in Egypt (both of the same and the opposite sex) tends to be closer than in the U.S. However, as with any cultural comparison, we must allow room for differences among individuals and families (see *Generalizations and Stereotypes*).



While members of your family may be physically affectionate with each other and may feel comfortable acting in the same manner toward your student, we recommend that male host family members (unless younger than the student) initially refrain from being physically affectionate toward their host daughter/sister as this level of physical contact may make her uncomfortable.

Shared Space

Another key difference between the U.S. and Egyptian cultures that may impact your hosting experience is the degree to which people from each culture generally like to create boundaries and establish ownership of materials things as well as space. In the U.S. we tend to have a sense of **high territoriality**, in other words we are more comfortable in a situation that allows for wide personal space, and we are more concerned with ownership of space and materials things and establishing boundaries. Egyptians, on the other hand, tend to exhibit **low territoriality** behaviors, meaning they are likely to be more comfortable in what we would consider close quarters and are usually less concerned with establishing and maintaining boundaries (with the exception of those between genders based on religious doctrine).

What do these differences re: space mean in practical terms to you and your student?

- At first your student may feel overwhelmed by the sheer size of our buildings, cars, classrooms and the space in between them. It will likely be tiring for him or her to navigate the distance between people and places.
- Your student may be surprised by the size of your refrigerator, the amount of groceries stored in your kitchen and/or pantry, and by the abundance of non-perishable, prepackaged foods available in the U.S.
- Your student may use the personal items of other family members without asking as this would not be considered improper back home in Egypt.
- You may find your student “hovering about” and in “in your space” more than other family members would, especially if your student is not sharing a room with a sibling.
- Your student may feel quite lonely, especially in the first days and weeks after arrival and seek out others in their rooms.
- Experiencing this relative excess of space may result in your student feeling isolated and/or excluded from the family, even though this is not the intention.



Ask each member of the family to spend some “quality time” with your student on a daily basis. If your family has a busy schedule and/or you do not often share meals together, make an effort to have family time at least once a week in the home. Play cards, board games or other activities that allow for conversation and fun. Preparing and sharing a meal together would be good.

Teenage Life

Peer Relationships

In Egypt close friends can be of the same or opposite sex although friends of the opposite sex are generally not as common among teens and they would not usually be permitted to spend time alone together in either case. It is acceptable for mixed groups of boys and girls to go out in larger cities.

While Egyptian students may have friends of both genders, physical contact between the genders is not generally accepted. Your student may misinterpret friendly hugs or casual touches given by members of the opposite sex (see *Sense of Space*).



Keep the lines of communication open and encourage your student to speak to you if he or she has concerns about physical contact. If need be, help your student practice sharing with peers how he or she feels about physical contact.

Talk with your student early in the experience about what efforts he or she is making to establish friendships and try to support and guide him or her in these efforts. By helping the student to address this challenge early on, you are setting the stage for a more balanced and fulfilling relationship with him or her later in the experience.

Dating and Marriage

The U.S. American concept of teenaged dating is unacceptable to Egyptian families. Often even open-minded, "modern" families are not comfortable with the idea of their teenage children having boyfriends/girlfriends. There are different dating customs and traditions for boys and girls. If a boy wants to date, most families wouldn't mind. Although it happens frequently, dating is not generally acceptable for girls and often remains hidden from their father and brothers.

When a girl is in a serious relationship, she will confide in her mother or sister but not her brother or father. The brother/father will only be informed of/accept a serious relationship if marriage has been proposed. Pre-arranged marriages still do exist in Egypt but make up only a very small percentage of all marriages. Pre-arranged in this context means that the parents help introduce their son/daughter to someone they may know or feel would be a suitable and a good match, as opposed to "forcing" them to marry.

Due to social and religious conventions, Egyptians don't usually engage in premarital sex. However preventative measures such as birth control and condoms are available in pharmacies. They also do not generally live together before marriage. Some couples will not move out of their parent's house, even after marriage, for financial reasons. The norm in many rural areas is for the bride and groom to move in with either one of their families.



My son from Egypt felt pressured by his peers to date even though he did not feel comfortable doing so. He wasn't use to the "forwardness" of some girls and didn't know how to respond to their actions. He had a very difficult time understanding and adjusting to the whole dating process.

U.S Host Family

My Egyptian student is very respectful. He has not experienced any romantic relationships while in the US. His religion does not allow sex prior to marriage.

U.S Host Family

Explain dating rules and behaviors openly and right from the start. Egyptian girls may not be comfortable going out on a date with a boy by but OK going out with him among group of mixed gender friends.



Egyptian students will likely be unfamiliar with U.S. American traditions such as homecoming and prom. If you know that such an event is approaching, raise the subject with your student and talk about his or her expectations in this regard. Don't pressure your student to have a date for prom or homecoming; chances are he or she will feel more comfortable going with a group of friends. There may be budget concerns, as well as the need for information about what generally happens leading up to and during such an event – a special dinner, corsage, pictures before or during the event, etc.

Free Time

Egyptian students tend to spend more of their free time with family in and outside the home than the typical U.S. teenage would (see *Family Life*). Their time after school is typically unstructured and they participate in few extra-curricular activities.

Egypt teens don't hold down part-time jobs like many U.S. American teens. Instead, their primary "job" may be viewed as studying. In their second and third years of secondary school many students spend several hours after school and on Fridays and Saturdays studying with private tutors and taking courses that will help prepare them for university entrance exams (see *Education*). Teens may also help their family by watching younger siblings while the parents go out. If a parent owns his/her business, small tasks are sometimes assigned to the son or daughter.



Students may not be used to the practice of getting an allowance for cleaning their room, taking out the trash, etc. The idea of receiving money to do chores may be uncomfortable or foreign to some students since this is not a practice in Egypt.



At first our student was not comfortable with me (the mom) picking him up and driving him places because in Egypt he is left more to his own devices (he lives in a city there with public transportation). Also, and I don't know if this is specific to just his family of Egyptian families in general but I think that we do a lot more as a family here than he does at home. He liked that here and I think wants to take that home to his family. Staying out late unsupervised is allowed for him at home (4am!) but is of course not allowed here but he was ready to follow our rules. One major difference is that apparently, lots of kids skip school frequently in Egypt because their families hire private tutors for them anyway...

U.S. Host Family

Education

Knowledge is in the head, not the copybook.

Thinking is more important than just getting knowledge from books

The following section highlights the key differences between the U.S. and Egyptian education systems that will have a considerable impact on your student's experience. For a general description of the Egyptian education system, please refer to the Appendix.

Teaching and Learning Styles

Today in the U.S. teachers are trained and strive to appeal to a variety of learning styles by incorporating experiential learning opportunities and a variety of teaching methodologies into their lesson plans. They often incorporate group discussion and projects that allow students to learn from each other and encourage lively debate and critical thinking. One's academic success is determined by a number of factors including class participation, homework, test scores, etc.

In the typical Egyptian secondary school, teaching most often takes the form of lecturing and learning is primarily achieved through repetition and memorization. Academic success is measured primarily through testing. Because of this and because the quality of teaching varies greatly among secondary schools in Egypt, many families rely on private tutors to ensure that their children have the knowledge and information they need to pass grade level and university entrance exams.



Egyptian primary and secondary school students are not usually encouraged to scrutinize or to think critically and many Egyptian students initially find it a challenge to do so in their U.S. high school.

Teacher/Student Relationship

Teachers are highly respected in Egypt. As a general rule, teachers are not addressed by their first name or a nickname out of respect for their authority and age. Students can raise their hand to make or argue a point in an indirect way, but they would rarely argue or contradict a teacher directly. In Egypt it is not the norm to know teachers on a personal level outside of class as students often do in the U.S.



My student was amazed that teachers here actually seemed to like students and did so many extra things with them outside of the school day. U.S. Host Family

U.S. Teachers who are unfamiliar with exchange students can misinterpret behaviors and ways of approaching homework and classroom interaction. For example, they could interpret the student as being shy and disinterested but in actuality the student may not be comfortable speaking with the teacher or raising his or her hand.



Contact your student's guidance counselor and teachers early on to get progress reports and address any misperceptions that may be hindering his or her integration and/or success in the classroom.

Daily and Weekly Schedule

Egyptian class subjects are chosen by the school, not the student. Teachers move from class to class, while students stay in the same room all day with the same group of students. Strong, long term relationships develop between students because of the amount of time they spend together in school.

In contrast to U.S. secondary schools where lunch can be purchased in the cafeteria and the break is around 30 minutes, in Egypt most secondary schools do not serve lunch (but students can bring their own) and their lunch break usually lasts 45-minutes.

Egyptian students attend school five days a week, usually Sunday through Thursday. Secondary school students often spend Saturdays receiving private academic tutoring. School is usually not in session on Friday as it is a holy day to attend Mosque, similar to Sunday in the U.S.



Egyptian students will not be accustomed to choosing their own courses and will need help from the host parents to determine their schedule.

Your student may have difficulty adjusting to having many classes with different classmates in a day since they are use to being with the same group of students every day since the 1st grade. Explain the importance of taking the opportunity to introduce themselves, to everyone.

Homework

In Egypt, homework is assigned but students are not required to turn it and it does not count toward their grade. Plagiarism is common practice since copyright standards are not generally observed. Students often help each other with homework. The importance of completing homework on an individual basis and on time may be difficult for your student to grasp.



Because of face saving and indirect communication styles, students may state they have done their homework and school is going well when in fact, it is not (seeing *Communication*). It may be a good idea to monitor homework and to provide help with schoolwork (or enlist help), especially in the beginning.

Explain the importance of home work and turning it in on time.

Stress to your student the importance of paying attention in class for no tutoring, as they know it, will be available. Reinforce that many factors contribute to a grade; attendance, participation, homework and that it is acceptable to ask teachers for help.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Egyptian schools do not normally offer extra-curricular activities. First year high school students may join private sports clubs such as soccer and basketball. Second and third year students may join, but it is unlikely as most of their time is spent on academic work.

While the amount of time spent at school is about the same in Egypt as in the U.S., many students will not be used to the busy after school schedule that is common in the U.S. Instead they are used to going home after school to study or play a game of soccer with friends. They will be unfamiliar with team sports associated with school and the commitment of time that is involved when joining a team.

Before your student commits to joining a sports team, ensure that he or she is aware of the time commitment, practice and game schedule.



Be sure and explain the importance of having and making friends through extra-curricular activities. Encourage your student to join in activities when possible. Your participant will likely need assistance in choosing which sport and/or club to participate during his or her first semester or quarter in school.

Help your student arrange car-pooling and show him or her how to use public transportation if available.

Egyptian students will likely be unfamiliar with the concept of school spirit. Explain to your student how this may be manifested at school (team mascots, pep rallies, cheer leaders, school colors, etc.) and consider giving him or her an item sporting the school logo as a welcome gift.

Parental Involvement at School

In Egypt, parents handle disciplinary actions, arrange for private tutoring, interact with teachers when problems arise and advise their children on decisions small and large (see *Family Life*). Your student will likely feel somewhat overwhelmed by all of the school-related choices he or she will be expected to make without significant parental involvement. We offer the following tips to help you help your student to gain confidence in his or her decision making abilities and to ease their transition into the U.S. school system.



Since your participant may be exhausted early on in the experience, advise your host son or daughter to limit his or her extra-curricular activities to one or two during the initial period of adjustment.

If applicable, remind your participant to pack a lunch and any clothing or equipment he or she might need for after school activities.



Inform your student of school standards such as I.D. tags, hall passes, lockers/combination locks and the period of time allowed to get from one class to another.

Remind your student to listen to the daily announcements to be informed of upcoming events and encourage him or her to refer to bulletin boards in the halls for club and other notices.

Clothing at School

Uniforms are worn in all schools in Egypt therefore your student may not initially be comfortable choosing what clothing to wear to school.



Discuss the high school dress code with your student shortly after arrival so that he or she is aware of what is appropriate and dresses accordingly.

Since your student will not be used to choosing what clothes to wear to school, assist him or her, at first, by picking out clothing the night before. This will help avoid delays in the morning.

School and Community Presentations

As a YES student, your host son or daughter has been asked to do presentations in his or her school and community. Foreign language/world history/English class teachers are usually receptive to these efforts. Encourage your student to inquire if their course teachers will give extra credit for these presentations. If you have children in middle or elementary school, encourage your student to do a presentation for their class, perhaps showing some soccer moves, Egyptian money, their flag, national costume, some belly dancing or teaching some Arabic (written and verbal). It's a great way to improve the student's English and inform others about his or her culture.

Transportation



Do a good deed on the road and throw it into the sea.
One should do good things without expecting a reward.

In the urban areas of Egypt, people travel by train, car, bus and taxi. Cairo has a modern, efficient subway but with a very dense population, smaller trucks and close driving distances, the transportation system and roads are extremely crowded (see *Sense of Space*). Cairo is notorious for its rush hour traffic jams and the seemingly hap hazardous traffic patterns. Traffic signals are very few and far between, pedestrians move in a systematic dance and honking has evolved into a language of its own. The Nile River is used for transporting goods and people as well as for recreational tours.



Transportation in the U.S. is vastly different from Egypt and it will take time for your student to get used to our available transportation and system of “parent/sibling shuttle.”



“Cairo Kisses” refer to the many small scrapes, scratches and dents the drivers in Cairo incur due to the heavy and close traffic. The picture to the left is of a car door and was taken from inside another car while stopped in traffic.

In Egypt school buses are not free of charge as they are in the U.S. Some private and international schools may provide this service for a fee which varies from one school to another. Public schools do not provide bus services. Your student may not be aware that your local school bus has different pick up/drop off locations, runs on a fixed schedule and that it is necessary to arrange for a ride from a student or family if he or she misses the bus.



Explain to your student that American school buses are free; have specific pick up/drop of locations; have assigned seats and fixed schedules and how they operate in your community.

Remind your student to plan ahead and that it is normal and necessary to arrange for a ride from a student or a family if he or she misses the school bus.

While public transportation is readily available in Cairo, most Egyptian participants, especially females, will be accustomed to being driven where they need to go by a family member, friend, driver or taxi, and on relatively short notice. They will likely not know that taxis are expensive in the U.S. and not be aware of the detailed planning that is often involved in figuring out how to get all members of a typical U.S. family where they need to be on a daily/weekly basis (see *Sense of Time*).

In Egypt it is common for teenagers to ride with friends that drive. The driver and any passenger in the front seat are required to wear seatbelts by law but it is not strictly enforced. Families in the U.S. are used to providing transportation for their teenagers, to and from school, to school activities and to special events. As the driving age in Egypt is 18 years and U.S. American drivers can be so much younger, your student may feel unsafe being driven by peers in the U.S.

Inform your student of seatbelt use laws in your community and remind him or her to always wear a seatbelt.

Explain your specific situation with available transportation and that it is common for U.S. students to rely on their family or to drive them to school and other various activities.



Remind your student that last minute transportation requests may be difficult, so your student needs to think ahead and let your family know their interests and schedule.

Alert your student that he/she may be asked to help pay for gas if riding a long distance with a friend, i.e. to a concert or other town event, and that this is acceptable. (In Egypt such a request would be considered quite rude).

Initially your student may feel that it is a burden to ask friends or siblings for a ride. You may want to facilitate these arrangements in the first few weeks of the experience until the student is reassured that it is acceptable to ask others for a ride.

The distances traveled in the course of a normal day in the U.S. are likely to be much longer than those to which your student is accustomed. He or she may be used to shorter distances and that is easier to get to and from places on their own via public transportation. It will take time for your student to get comfortable traveling around and to get used to the time that it takes to get from one point to another.



Explain the distances between points in the U.S. to your Egyptian student. It will be helpful to do this in terms of their country size and to discuss how far our distances are compared to Egypt. Talk to your student about distances in miles versus kilometers.

Give your student a map of your town and state to help orientation him or her to the area.



Our student was surprised to find out that everything needs to be planned – running late is a problem. However, on the flipside, if you are on time, you do not have a long wait ahead of you.

U.S. Host Family

Sense of Time

With every delay comes a blessing.

Delays are not necessarily a bad thing. It might be that fate/destiny has something else in store for you.

In the U.S. we tend to go to great lengths to schedule our time and set and stick to deadlines. Time here is viewed as a tangible and limited commodity; it can be wasted, spent, saved and earned. We value promptness and being on time for an appointment is a sign of respect for the other person's time. The fact that time is a significant value for U.S. Americans makes the value of efficiency highly important in our culture. For example, solving a problem quickly and successfully is considered a sign of competence.

In contrast, Egyptians tend to view time as unlimited and flowing and much greater flexibility exists around deadlines and schedules. Spending time attending to relationships with others is more important than being punctual (see *Culture and Perception*), and cutting a conversation short in order to be able to make another meeting on time could be seen as a sign of disrespect.



In the U.S. we are generally more future-oriented while Egyptians tend to be oriented to the past and present.

People from future-oriented cultures tend to look forward to and plan for the future whether looking a few days, months or years ahead. This doesn't mean that they are not concerned with the past or present but that planning for the future is generally of greater concern than the past or present. This view of time contributes to the value of optimism as reflected in the U.S. proverb. "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." This optimistic view of the future is also a reflection of the belief that we can actually control the future.



In Egypt our perception of time is very different. For us, time is abundant and on-going. We are living in the present. We do not usually plan for the future. If we do, we are not certain about it, because we do not know what fate will bring.

Egyptian Host Mother

People from past-oriented cultures tend to believe strongly in the significance of prior events. History, established religions and tradition are extremely important to them and there is a strong belief that the past should be the guide for making decisions. People from present-oriented cultures generally "live in the moment" because they see the future as vague, ambiguous and unknown. For these cultures what really exists is the here and now and the present should be enjoyed.

This past/present orientation toward time is reflected in the use of the phrase *in sha'Allah* or "God willing" when referring to almost any event in the future and the belief that one's fate or destiny is predetermined by God (see *Religion and Other Values*).

Another indication of this value is the use of the phrase *ma'alish* which translates roughly to "never mind," or "don't worry about it." This phrase is generally used as a vague excuse in many situations, and is also often used when a person is late. It reflects that in the delayed person's perspective, the cause of the delay was ultimately outside of his or her control.

As stated earlier, in U.S. culture, being on time is a sign of respect for the other person. Last minute cancellations are generally not OK. In many U.S. towns there is little to no public transportation so families must plan their outings in advance to be able to accommodate all members. Schedules are set and last minutes changes are generally unwelcome because of the impact they will have on others. If we are going to visit someone, we usually arrange a date and time well in advance, even with close family members and friends.



Explain to your student that last minute cancellations are generally perceived as a sign of disrespect in the U.S. and he or she should notify someone as soon as possible if plans change.

Remind your student that if he or she should be late for class, an appointment, or a meeting with friends, a quick apology followed by a brief explanation would be appreciated. Give her an example such as, "Sorry I am late. I had to wait for my brother/ couldn't find my backpack/missed the bus" etc.

In contrast, most Egyptian students come from the urban centers of Cairo and Alexandria where widespread public transportation is available and both day and night traffic jams and gridlock are the norm (see *Transportation*). If one is late for an appointment, people usually understand because everyone expects delays. If someone needs a ride on short notice it is not viewed as a problem or an inconvenience to others. He or she can either take public transportation or ask a family member, friends or even a neighbor for a ride. Last minute plans and cancellations are generally OK and dropping in on friends or family at any time is acceptable.



Instruct your student to let you know his or her transportation and other scheduling needs a week or more in advance whenever possible so that your family will be able to schedule these events in.

If there is an event that requires the student to be punctual, remind him or her multiple times of the need to be on time (see *Communication*). If you don't already have one, post a family calendar where your student and other family members can note and view their and each other's appointments. Use this as a tool to help emphasize to your student the need to plan ahead and to remind him or her of situations in which promptness is important.

Personal Hygiene and Grooming

Concepts of cleanliness vary greatly around the world as do practices related to personal hygiene and grooming. The way we dress, bathe, use the toilet and do our laundry are all influenced by culture. There is generally an unspoken routine for cleanliness and hygiene within every culture.

Cleanliness and Religious Washing

Bathrooms can differ from one country to another because of climate or culture, and in the Egyptian culture, water is sign of cleanliness. Due to the hot and dry climate most bathrooms are tiled with ceramic, both walls and floors, so there is no harm in leaving water on the floor or countertop as is commonly done.

In Islam, the 5 daily prayers (*Salat*) require a state of cleanliness. Abolition or washing is required before each of the 5 daily prayers. Prayer is regulated by ritual purification before hand, which requires washing the hands, mouth, nose, face, arms up to the end of the elbow, head, ears, and feet up to the ankles.



You might be very surprised to find your bathroom floor is standing in water and the carpet has molded because your host student appears to be messy when washing. He or she may not realize that water in some of our humid climates does not evaporate quickly. It sits and this extra moisture can cause mold to occur, and do damage. U.S. Host Family



Suggest to your student to place a small hand towel or absorbent mat under his or her feet to minimize making the floor or carpet wet and then show him or her where to hang it up after use.

In colder or more humid climates, explain to your student the need to use a towel to wipe or soak up any spilled water instead of leaving it to air dry.

Bathroom Routines

Bathroom routines are learned at a very young age in the home but are not often discussed among family members. Discussion of these routines can touch upon subjects that will cause the average U.S. teenager to roll their eyes or want to leave the room! Now, imagine having this conversation in a second language among relative strangers or not having it all and being expected to figure everything out on your own and the embarrassment that could result!

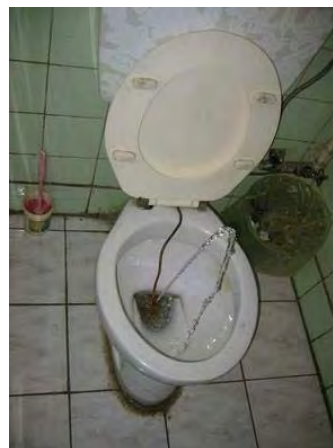


It is very important that a family member (of the same sex as the student) have a frank and detailed discussion with the student about bathroom routines within 1-2 days of arrival.

Following are some suggestions of topics to cover and ways in which typical Egyptian bathroom routines may differ from those in the U.S.

- Timing of bathroom use by family members in morning or evening.
- Optimum shower length (due to amount of hot water, cost of heating it, and/or limited bathrooms available).
- Towels - How often should they be replaced? Where do they get placed? Who replaces them?
- How often are teeth to be brushed? Do family members share toothpaste?
- The use of deodorants, make-up and perfumes and any restrictions due to sensitivity of others to strong scents.
- The need for the shower curtain to be placed in the tub so that water flows in the tub and drains, and not onto the floor (where it does not necessarily dry quickly as it would typically do in Egypt).
- How and where to dispose of toilet paper, tissues and feminine hygiene products. (Toilet paper in Egypt is not designed to dissolve in water and is therefore not disposed of by flushing.)
- Which products are shared and which are for individual use. Who replaces these supplies?
- How and when to use a bathroom fan.

Your student may be used to a toilet similar to a bidet, which provides a stream of water for cleaning purposes, and may be surprised at the lack of this type of fixture in most U.S. bathrooms.



Showering at School

Egyptian Students are typically more modest than U.S. students and your student may feel uncomfortable changing and showering for gym or having a physical exam for sports.



Be sure to explain to your student that it is customary for students to shower after gym class or sports practice at school, in a large, tiled area with several shower heads. If your student feels uncomfortable showering at school, suggest that he or she take a quick shower the first thing after returning from school. Alert the student's Physical Education teacher or coach ahead of time, that this may be the case.

Swimming

In keeping with their Muslim faith, it is not unusual for Egyptian women who do swim to do so with some type of clothing on in addition to a swimsuit.



Ask your student if he or she knows how to swim. Be sure that your student understands safety in and around the water and that he or she wears a life-jacket when appropriate.

If your female student has the opportunity to swim offer a t-shirt and shorts to be worn over her swimsuit.



Our student wanted to be covered from head to toe even when swimming. This involved purchasing Under Armour to wear under a swim suit. We also needed to have a hijab made to match her prom dress and as well as one for her cap and gown.

U.S. Host Family

Body Hair

Removal of body hair is natural part of cleanliness for both Egyptian males and females. Shaving and body waxing (for females) and shaving or trimming underarm and pubic hair (for males) is customary. Help your host son or daughter locate the necessary products as needed.

Feet/Shoes

In the U.S., many people may take off their shoes when relaxing or upon entering their home. It may also be common to walk around the house in socks or bare-feet so as not to track dirt into the house. In Egypt the norm is to remove one's shoes upon entering the home and either go barefoot or wear slippers in order to avoid tracking dirt into and around the house. When not wearing shoes, as they are seen as unclean, Egyptians usually place them in a particular location or separate location outside, and never to be turned upside down with the sole showing (see *Nonverbal Communication*).



Explain to your student your family's norms around shoes. Where they are kept. When they should be worn and whether to wear slippers indoors.

Laundry

While your student may say, "Yes," when asked if he or she has ever done laundry, (to save face) in reality this may not be the case. In Egypt it is relatively inexpensive to have laundry sent out and many families do. Often the mother takes sole responsibility for the laundry. In addition, it is common to wash men's laundry separate from women's.



Discuss with your student the specifics of laundry in your household. When it is done and who does it. How it is done (separating whites and colors and using different water temperatures, how much soap/bleach and the mechanics of using the machine) Review similar information for the use of the dryer.

Specify your family's routine around washing sheets and towels.



Family: *We were real concerned about our student's personal cleanliness as he has not changed his sheets weekly or put them in the laundry to be washed.*

Student: *My family isn't very clean, as it has been a month, and my mother has never changed my sheets.*

Both waited for the other to act instead of discussing the issue.

Privacy and Modesty in the Home

Special attention may need to be given to the comfort level of your student even though he or she has been welcomed into your household as one of your children. There is still a certain sense of modesty and shared respect that will provide him or her with a sense of comfort. Because Egyptian students are generally modest, your student may be surprised to see siblings or parents in their underwear or only covered with a bath towel. Please be aware of this modesty and be aware of your family's habits.

It would be helpful for adult and teen family members to avoid being in their student's presence in particularly revealing clothes or pajamas.



Knock on your student's door before entering his or her bedroom.

A host daughter would not feel comfortable being awakened by her host father.

If your family enjoys camping, considering how sleeping arrangements can best suit your student. Perhaps have female and younger family members share one tent and older male family members another.

Dogs and Pets

There exist a lot of misunderstandings about the issue of dogs in Islam. While the dog itself is mentioned in the Qur'an as a loyal and honest companion, in most Muslim communities the dog is acquired for the purposes of protection as a watch dog or for special use with hunters or police. They are not commonly viewed as domestic pets, nor treated as a family member as is often the case in the U.S. Dogs are generally not allowed in the house for the simple fact that their saliva is considered unclean and it should not touch any piece of clothing or part of the body. Many exchange students are very uncomfortable with or scared of dogs in the house for these reasons. Students might request that the dog not be permitted to enter their room. Normally by the time the student prepares to return to their home country, their comfort level and perception of the dog has changed.



If you have a dog and your student is uncomfortable with it, please discuss ways of addressing the issue with him or her. Solutions in the past have been to keep the dog out of the student's bedroom. Understand that your student may not pet your dog and would prefer, at least initially, not to be assigned chores associated to dog care, especially walking or cleaning up after it.

Gender Roles

Similar to many patriarchal societies, Egyptian gender roles are often oversimplified. It is true that on the surface it is a male dominated system, but Egyptian women have a significant amount of control behind the scenes in the family life. This complex relationship between males and females in Egypt is continuously changing, but it is important to recognize that your student will be used to somewhat different norms than exist in the United States.

In Egypt women are often expected to stay home, raise the children and take care of the house, while the men are seen as the breadwinners of the family. This generalization does not hold true for every family of course. In the past, young girls in Egypt were taught to cook and care for the home. Today these skills are seen as complimentary, but not exclusive, as many women pursue professional degrees. They are, however, encouraged to marry earlier than women in the United States. In general, domestic chores are not expected of men or boys. The genders are not necessarily seen in a hierarchy, but rather as complimentary. In Egypt, men and women are perceived to have different natures and tendencies and therefore occupy different spheres in society. Women are generally seen as better suited to care for the children and the home, while men concern themselves more with pursuits outside the home.

Contemporary societal and economic demands have begun to come in conflict with this mentality. There has been a push for equality between the genders in Egypt and in the region by more progressive aspects of society and some governments; however, gender roles are sometimes justified by religious references to the Quran, although most of the often-cited texts are subject to multiple interpretations.



Your participant may not be comfortable with an equitable division of labor within the household, especially if your participant is male. When confusion arises, it is best to talk openly and straightforwardly with your host son or daughter about the differences of culture, and explain the chore and decision-making process employed in most U.S. households.

Women and girls are expected to be modest and well behaved and have restricted contact with males. Different gender roles are very important in the context of relationships. Public displays of affection between couples, especially non-married couples, are not appropriate in Egypt and time spent alone between unmarried males and females is frowned upon. In a collectivist society as in Egypt social pressures are intense and often set the norms for behavior (see *Individualism and Collectivism*).

Dating and romantic relationships in Egypt are appropriate only when marriage is a possible outcome as opposed to dating more casually as is often the case in the United States (see *Family Life*).

It is hard to separate the implications of underlying Egyptian gender relations from dating and relationship norms in society. But to generalize, the genders in Egypt have more defined roles and parameters in society resulting in more conservative interaction between the two (see *Space*).

Adjusting to U.S. American Gender Roles

Some students, often males, will have a difficult time adjusting to the change in gender roles and expectations. For example, male participants may be unwilling to participate in household chores viewing these activities to be in a woman's domain. Male participants may not understand what is expected of them and may react with uncertainty to a more authoritative role of the mother in the household or expect most of the decisions to be deferred to the father.



He was unused to sharing as much in the kitchen work as we asked him to. He told us that in his home it was the women who did the kitchen work, but that he had occasionally helped as a gift to his mother. However he worked hard to show that he could fit into our family rules, which entailed a chart which delineated who would clean, cook and so on.

U.S. Host Family

It is important to note though that Egyptian female exchange participants are probably fairly liberal and open-minded, as are their parents, given their willingness to travel to the United States for a year. They are students that are likely to respect limited contact with males in the household and perhaps more willing to do chores than their male counterparts. On the whole, they should adapt well.



He and several of his friends were playing around during lunch and one of the girls playfully slapped him lightly on the face. He was furious and took this as a huge insult that he never got over.

U.S. Host Family

Students may also be surprised by the public assertiveness of many women in the United States. You can make your Egyptian son or daughter feel at ease by being sensitive to the norms he or she is used to, while also exposing him or her to American culture. Do not be surprised if your son or daughter is uncomfortable with any level of physical interaction between the genders (see *Space* and *Family Relationships*). Bridging the gender gap is often one of the biggest adjustments Egyptian participants make. Families often note an initial standoffishness between a host son and mother or between a host daughter and father. This is normal and the relationship will evolve over the course of the year.

Religion

Role of Religion in Egypt

In Islam, religion plays an important part in legislative laws, while in the U.S. church and state are separate. In Egypt religion permeates all aspects of life, from the frequency of calls to daily prayer, customs of dress, dietary codes and food restrictions, holidays and the constant references to Allah's will or blessings, whether a person is a Muslim, Coptic Christian, or any other religion. Although Egypt is a secular state (officially neutral in matters of religion), Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic its official language. Islamic principles guide the nation's laws, business relations, and social customs.

People classify others by religion in Egypt. Your Egyptian student may feel compelled to do so while in the U.S. as a way to try to find common ground, and to help determine what topics are acceptable for discussion. Most Egyptians believe that morals are based solely on religion, and if one is not religious, one does not have morals.

Role of Religion in the U.S.

Just as the U.S. education system (especially at the high school level) is more than academics and is often the center of a student's social life, religious observance in the U.S. often includes more than worship. For families who are involved in a religious community, in addition to it being a center for their spiritual life, it is likely to be a place where social contacts are made by the entire family.



If applicable, explain to your student the role that religion plays in your life – not just the worship aspect, but the social and any service aspects as well.

While your student may be willing to participate in your religious community at some level it must be understood that he or she has come to the U.S. on a cultural exchange program and community members should not use this exchange as an opportunity to attempt to proselytize or convert the student. The family should respect the student's choice not to participate if that is his or her preference. Under no circumstances should a student be forced to attend religious services.



Reinforce to your student that it is inappropriate for anyone to attempt to convert him or her or to criticize them for their religious beliefs.

Please convey to any religious community leaders with whom your student may come into contact that no pressure is to be put on the student to convert. Encourage your student to let you know if he or she encounters such pressure from any source so you can address it directly with the individual/s involved.



If you are a church-going family, we recommend making them go to church with you every Sunday as your own children are expected to but tell them that you respect their faith and do not want to convert them to Christianity. Misunderstanding about this would be terrible. Most of our close friends are at church and our student would be missing a major part of our life if we didn't make him a part of it. We gave him the option to sit with us in church, go to youth group, pray on his own somewhere in the church during service, do his homework, whatever as long as he was there and socializing afterwards with us. He opted to volunteer in the nursery most of the time and really enjoyed being a part of our congregation. We showed respect for his faith by attending Eid service at a local Mosque with him.

U.S. Host Family

While Egypt is a predominantly Muslim country, about 10% of the population is Christian. And as with predominantly Christian countries such as the U.S. there are some who follow religious doctrine more strictly than others. The following sections will describe some key terms such as “Coptic Christianity,” “Muslim” and “Islam,” how the Christian and Muslim religions as generally practiced in Egypt and how these issues may impact your hosting experience.



The biggest difference is that my Egyptian host son is Muslim and he doesn't eat pork or ham. He comes from a very strict culture compared to people in the US. I find his religious beliefs to be typical of mine. I'm LDS (Mormon).

U.S. Host Family

Key Terms

Coptic Christianity

While the minority in Egypt, Coptic Christians belong to the native Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. A Copt is a native Egyptian Christian whose ancestors embraced Christianity in the first century. The word "Coptic" was originally used in Classical Arabic to refer to Egyptians in general. It has changed over the centuries to mean more specifically Egyptian Christian after the bulk of the Egyptian population converted to Islam.

Islam

Islam is the predominant religion in Egypt, with Muslims comprising about 90% of a population of around 83 million Egyptians.

Islam, literally means having peace with God, peace and submission to the will of Almighty God (Allah). It provides a constant balance between spiritual and the material life of the individual, as well as the community... Islam is not only a “religion”, but it is a way of life symbolized by mercy, forgiveness and peace – with God, with oneself, and with the creations of God through submission and commitment to the guidance provided by God. (Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat)

We should distinguish between mainstream Islam from religious fanaticism or extremism. All religions have extremists - Christian, Jewish or Muslim. Many people of the West mistakenly equate the religion of Islam with the beliefs of Islamic extremist groups. While there are extremist groups that manipulate

the underlying tenets of the religion to further their own political objectives, their beliefs, teachings and use of violence does not represent the true and founding principles of Islam, which at its core is a religion of peace.

Muslim

A Muslim is one who practices and adheres to Islam. The followers of Islam are called Muslims. Muslims are not to be confused with Arabs. Muslims may be Arabs, Turks, Persians, Indians, Pakistanis, Malaysians, Indonesians, Europeans, Africans, Americans, Chinese, or any other nationality.

Arab

An Arab could be a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew or an atheist. Any person who adopts the Arabic language is called an Arab. However, the language of the Qur'an (the Holy Book of Islam) is Arabic. Muslims all over the world try to learn Arabic so that they may be able to read the Qur'an and understand its meaning. They pray in the language of the Qur'an, namely Arabic.

The Qur'an

Muslims follow the *Qur'an*, or holy book, which is the principle source of guidance for Muslims' faith and everyday practices. It deals with all subjects including wisdom, doctrine, worship, and law. It provides guidance for a just society, proper human conduct and equitable economic principles.

Practices of Islam

The most important practices (primary obligations or duties) of Islam are known as the Five Pillars. In many ways these define and as their name suggests, support the entire religion, covering the expression of faith, regular prayer, supporting the poor, fasting, and pilgrimage. (For a description of the Five Pillars of Islam, the Ten Key Tenants of Islam and differences and similarities between the Christian and Muslim faiths, please see the Appendix.)



My Egyptian goes to his bedroom and prays five times a day. Muslim people face East to pray. After a few months, I ask him which direction he faces when he prays. He had been facing West because he didn't know which direction was east. I kidded him about that and got him facing the right direction.

U.S. Host Family

Islamic Prayer

- Prayer is observed five times daily (dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, night (their times differ slightly every day and location))
- Muslims pray facing in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, a city in present day Saudi Arabia.
- Prayer is regulated by ritual purification before hand, which requires washing.
- The prayer ritual includes standing, bowing, touching the forehead to the floor (which is covered with a prayer mat or other clean surface), sitting back, and holding the hands in cupped position.
- Muslims may pray in a mosque, in their home, office or in public places.

Due to the location of the nearest mosque and/or their participation in extra-curricular activities, while in the U.S., not all Muslim students are able to or will choose to attend the traditional Friday service. Some students who regularly attend back home, prefer to attend only periodically while in the U.S. and especially during Ramadan.

Tips & Recommendations to Assist Your Muslim Student in Prayer



It is important to discuss your student's specific needs around prayer. The following information will provide some tips and topics that you should cover. It is equally important to discuss any related needs with your school administrator so that they may be accommodated while the student is at school.

- Help your student find the location of the nearest Mosque and give him or her them the opportunity to visit, especially in times of stress and during holidays. For accurate prayer times and to find a local mosque refer to the following website (You will need your zip code as orientation towards Mecca.)
www.islamicfinder.com
- You may wish to provide your student with a compass to determine the direction to Mecca, so that he or she will always be able to tell the correct direction to pray.
- Your student will want a clean, private space where dogs have not stepped, most likely his or her bedroom to perform daily prayers at home.
- Most likely your student will bring a prayer mat, but if not, please make a prayer mat (rug) available.
- For purification please have a small bowl, the location of the nearest water, and a few small towels for washing and drying up afterwards (see *Personal Hygiene and Grooming*).
- Avoid staring at, walking in front of, or interrupting your student or a person during prayer. If your student is in his or her room for prayer, we recommend having a notice on the door of prayer time and establish that no family member can enter the room at this time. While your student is praying he/she will not answer your questions, take a call or answer the door.
- Talk to your student before school starts about how he or she would like to handle prayer during school times. Speak with the school officials to help make arrangements. Reassure your student that it is OK to make requests of this nature.
- Visitors to a mosque must remove their shoes before entering and dress conservatively wearing clothing that covers the entire body.

Dietary Requirements & Religious Celebrations

Islam

Although much simpler than the dietary law followed by Jews and the early Christians, Islam allows Muslims to eat everything considered to be good for the health. It restricts certain items such as pork and its by-products, alcohol and any narcotic or addictive drugs.



Your student may not always be aware that certain American foods contain pork. It is a good idea to have a talk with your host son or daughter about issues of diet and what foods he or she is comfortable eating. As with other religions, there is a wide spectrum of how strictly individuals or families adhere to or interpret dietary requirements (see *Food*).

Ramadan

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. During this holy month, the month in which the *Qur'an* was revealed to Prophet Mohammed, all able-bodied, post pubescent Muslims are required to fast, with some exceptions.



The lunar calendar is used to calculate the dates of Muslim holidays, and is about eleven days shorter than the western calendar therefore religious holidays differ from year to year. Please check the www.islamicfinder.com for specific dates and prayer times for the month of Ramadan.

During Ramadan Muslims celebrate two major holidays: *Eid of Sacrifice (Eid ul-Adha)* and *Eid of Fast-Breaking (Eid ul-Fitr)*. The *Eid of Sacrifice* is in remembrance of the sacrifice by the Prophet Abraham of his son. The *Eid of Fast-Breaking* occurs at the end of the month of fasting.



During Ramadan Muslims generally do not eat, drink, or smoke between sunrise and sunset. It would be useful for you to have foods prepared and stored in the refrigerator for your student to eat prior or after these times.

Coptic Christians – Fasting

Christians of Egypt, who belong mostly to the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, observe fasting periods according to the Coptic calendar. These fasting periods are matched by no other Christian community. Of the 365 days of the year, the Copts fast over 210 days.

The Coptic Orthodox fasting periods are designed to foster spiritual development and focus on liturgical practices. Fasting is not generally viewed as a hardship, but rather a privilege and joy in preparing for the coming “Feast Day.” All Coptic Orthodox Christians are expected to fast following a prescribed set of guidelines. Dispensation is however granted under special circumstances, such as sickness.

General rules: According to the Coptic Orthodox tradition of fasting periods, the diet is mainly vegan, cooked with either oil or water. No animal products (meat, poultry, fish, milk, eggs, butter, etc.) are allowed.

Non-fasting periods: There are 7 weeks during the year where there is no fasting even on Wednesday and Friday. These are the 7 weeks between Easter and Pentecost. These 7 weeks are fast-free because this period is a period of joy for Christians in celebration of the Resurrection of Christ.



As your student to share the specifics of his or her needs during any fasting period that he or she observes.

Website for additional information on Coptic fasting:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fasting_and_abstinence_of_the_Coptic_Orthodox_Church_of_Alexandria

Clothing

While Egypt has long valued its role as one of the more tolerant of the predominantly Muslim nations, women are expected to dress modestly in Islam, and cover the shoulders and knees. However, female dress varies and is impacted by the local customs, culture, family and individual preference. Most women living in rural areas cover the hair and body (except the face and hands) completely when in public. Men are expected to cover themselves between the bellybutton and knees, and often wear the *gallabeyya* (a long, dress-like robe). The *gallebeyya* coupled with a beard can be a sign of religious faith. Many men also wear head coverings similar to turbans.

As with any cultural characteristic, the degree to which individuals adhere to these guidelines does vary.



Hijab

The wearing of the *hijab* is a personal choice for most women in Egypt and is a symbol of their commitment to God. Because of this, if your student wears a *hijab*, any decision to remove it while in the U.S. would not be taken lightly.



Abaya

The *abaya* is a cloak which covers the entire body except the face. While the *abaya* is a traditional part of the Gulf Arab dress (ie. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, etc), fewer women in Egypt may choose to wear it. While Egypt is a deeply religious society, there is choice. Wearing the *abaya* is for the most conservative and it would be highly unusual for your hosted daughter to wear the *abaya*.

Diversity and Social Structure

Although Egyptian society is much more homogeneous than U.S. society, there are regional linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences. The vast majority of Egyptians (90%) descend from both native Egyptians and Arabs who conquered Egypt in the seventh century. The rest of the population is composed of Nubians (who live in southern Egypt), Bedouin nomads (who live in the Sinai Peninsula), Greeks, Italians, Syro-Lebanese and Berbers (who live in the Siwa Oasis in the Western Desert). The official language is Arabic, but French and English are also spoken.



The elite upper class in Egypt is about 10% of the population and is composed largely of established, influential wealthy families. The next 30% of the population is considered the middle class and are primarily professionals and business owners. The remainder of the population consists of small farmers, rural villagers and urban poor. Although moving up or down in influence is possible, making or losing money doesn't create a quick change in social class, i.e. an upper class family will maintain its standing even if the family fortune has gone away or a very successful business family will not be elevated to upper class for a couple of generations. Clearly the family comfort level may move more quickly but prestige lags behind.



Egyptian students will typically not have experienced having classmates at school from significantly different socio-economic circumstances. Prepare your student for this reality if it applies to his or her school and remind him or her that it is appropriate to treat with respect everyone with whom he or she comes into contact.

Egyptian society is **hierarchical** in nature, whereas the U.S. is **egalitarian**. A hierarchical society is one in which a higher degree of inequality among people is accepted and seen as they way things should be. In hierarchal societies, status is based primarily on who you are, the family you were born into, your age, seniority, etc. as opposed to in an egalitarian society in which status is based on what you do, and your personal and professional accomplishments (see *Values*).

The Egyptian hierarchical system is apparent in day to day interaction. It is fairly common for upper class families to have servants. Although individuals from different levels work well with each other, the relationships are significantly different than they are in the United States. If an Egyptian maid or housekeeper were eating her lunch in the kitchen and a son or daughter of the family came in for a snack, the maid would be treated politely but at a distance. They would not eat together as they might in the United States. Sales clerks, auto repair personnel, carpenters, plumbers, laborers, and such, are less influential than the upper class and social courtesies, such as expressing thanks or acknowledging helpfulness would not be offered to someone from a lower class. Parents (especially mothers) would not necessarily expect their children to say "please" or "thank you," and vice versa, because they are only doing what is expected of them as a member of the family.



Whatever the case may be for your participant, if the use of “please” and “thank you” is important to you and your family members, explain this early on to the participant and remind him or her of this until it becomes a habit. Don’t let it slide in the beginning or unnecessary resentment will build!

Egyptian students may be uncomfortable with the apparent classless identification of U.S. Americans. Class based behaviors outside what your student would be expected to do at home may take some getting accustomed to, i.e. an upper class person should never be seen doing manual labor in public. Washing your car in the driveway or mowing the lawn just isn’t done. In Egypt, one must also dress as well as one can. An upper class individual would be horrified to be seen in an old T-shirt and blue jeans.

U.S. American “hidden” class structure may be difficult for the Egyptian student to understand at first. They are accustomed to being able to identify and categorize people they meet into neat groupings by occupation or appearance. Each societal grouping, or class, will be expected to respond to each other’s class in predictable ways. In Egypt, everyone knows who each player is and what rules apply to each group. In U.S. American society, understanding the relationships between groups is made more difficult by individuals in each group being able to be a member of a number of different groups at the same time and to enter and leave groups as a matter of choice. A host parent’s work group, church group, tennis, bowling, or golf group, and the group of old high school buddies may be totally different people from one group to the next. Treating everyone with the same courtesies and considering everyone’s opinions are adjustments that may take some time.



Tell your student that regardless of one’s perceived or actual status in the U.S. it is important to treat all people equally and with respect.

Outside of Cairo and other large cities, many Egyptians have had relatively little sustained exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. And 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.



As a host family you can help your Egyptian 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 accommodating those with disabilities a national requirement. The same is not true in Egypt. People with disabilities in Egypt are more likely to be very sheltered, protected and kept at home. Children with physical disabilities tend to be more integrated in society than children with mental disabilities. Therefore many Egyptian students may have had limited contact with individuals with any kind of disability. Currently Egyptians are trying to improve the number of specialized schools for people with disabilities beyond those with hearing or vision impairment and some private schools have begun to mainstream children with physical disabilities.

Other Values

What are Beliefs and Values?

U.S. Americans tend to believe, for instance, that the individual is the focal point of social existence, that laws apply equally to everyone and that people have a right to certain kinds of privacy. These beliefs have a strong influence on what U.S. Americans think about the world around them and how they behave toward each other. U.S. American culture is diverse and there are certain core values, or norms, that unite most Americans. While these are common to many U.S. citizens, they do not apply to everyone.

Egyptians characteristically believe that many, if not most, things in life are controlled, ultimately, by fate rather than by humans; that everyone loves children; that wisdom increases with age; and that the inherent personalities of men and women are vastly different. These beliefs play a powerful role in determining the nature of Egyptian culture.

Despite these differences, Egyptians are more homogeneous than Americans in their outlook on life. All Egyptians share basic beliefs and values that cross national and class boundaries. Social attitudes have remained relatively constant because Egyptian society is conservative and demands conformity. Egyptian beliefs are influenced by Islam, even if they are not Muslims; child rearing practices are nearly identical; and the family structure is essentially the same. Egyptians are not as mobile as the Americans and they have a high regard for tradition. The role of the family, the class structure, religious and political behavior, patterns of living, the presence of change and the impact of economic development are all factors that influence people's lives.

At first, Americans may feel that Egyptians are difficult to understand, that their behavior patterns are not logical. In fact, their behavior is quite understandable, even predictable. For the most part it conforms to certain patterns that make Egyptians consistent in their reactions to other people. It is important for Americans to be aware of these cultural patterns, to distinguish them from individual traits. By becoming aware of patterns, one can achieve a better understanding of what to expect and thereby understand more easily. The following list of Egyptian and American values, religious attitudes and self-perceptions are fundamental aspects of Egyptian and American culture.

Self Reliance versus Long-Term Relationships

U.S. Americans tend to be individualistic (see *Generalizations and Stereotypes*) and decision making is an important skill that parents, educators, etc. usually teach from a very young age. Despite the rise of the "Helicopter Parent" in the U.S. teenagers are generally brought up to be independent and resolve their own problems. Parents are backstage observing and providing support when necessary. U.S. teens are not expected to rely on others as much as Egyptian teenagers do. They are prepared to live on their own and pay their own bills at a much earlier age than the vast majority of Egyptian youth.

Family is the social center of Egyptian life and Egyptians take time to build lasting relationships. Families are close-knit and hospitable and value the comfort and happiness of all members. It is difficult for Egyptian students to be self-reliant because it is expected that they would rely on family members for guidance and support in all decisions both large and small. Immediate and extended family members are all part of a student's family (see *Family Life*).



Explain that making mistakes is OK, not shameful, but your student should learn from them, be accountable and responsible. This should be discussed several times with your student but change may take time as your student will need to reflect on it.

Providing clear answers to your student's questions and concerns is important – and repeating them, sometimes several times – may be necessary.

Control versus Fate



Man thinks, God takes care of things.

Do what you can and leave the rest for God to take care of.

In sha' Allah – God willing

Egyptians believe that "We are not in control." Whatever happens – happens. They believe that God knows what decision they are going to make, not that God is forcing them to make a certain decision. They are in control of what decision they are making. The emphasis in the U.S. tends to be on individuality and U.S. Americans can be quite competitive because they have a greater sense of being able to control their own destiny based on their actions versus the will of God. There is a more fluid class system in the U.S. than in Egypt. Hard work, when coupled with greater earnings, is rewarded with a rise

in social class. The end result is more important than the process in the U.S. culture. American students are typically result-oriented and efficiency is highly valued. The more they can solve problems and fix situations, the better prepared they are for life.

Egyptians generally believe that consensus is most important and that one does not just “take charge.” Money and power changes people and it is important to be patient. Teenagers usually do not take action as this is the role of older family members. It is difficult for Egyptian students to take charge of their own affairs as they are not used to acting independently; it is not their role. They are not supposed to be in control of their own future and they need validation at every turn.

The eye cannot rise above the eyebrow.

Be satisfied with your station in life.

Equality versus Hierarchy

Egyptians have a hierarchical society but tend to believe that there are differences that need to be recognized and respected according to one’s position in society. U.S. Americans are brought up to believe in social equality and equal opportunity. While ready to defend individual rights at any time, Americans are not adverse to rules that are applied evenly and fairly to everyone. They are all “equal under the law” but inequality still exists.

Today the United States has "equal opportunity" laws prohibiting discrimination against individuals based on such things as race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, and level of ability. Egyptians tend to believe that as long as one’s actions do not interfere with or harm anyone else, one has the “right” to do as one pleases in order to live life in a free and satisfying way.

American Dream versus Tradition and Dignity

Egyptians have a rich history with many traditions and take great pride in these. In Egyptian culture it is important to value one's dignity as well as that of one's family and community. Egyptians tend to strive to show their “best face” and therefore it is important to avoid confrontation. Egyptians are likely to believe that U.S. Americans value individual opportunity and success, abundance and buying/owning things. This may be difficult for your student to understand. To most Egyptians, materialism, individualistic and personal success is the exception, not the rule.



Be patient and understanding with your student. It is important to plan activities together, to celebrate birthdays and to honor holidays. Plan ahead and try to incorporate some part of your student’s culture into these occasions.

You are like a tree, giving your shade to the outside.

You should give more attention to your own family.

Speaking up versus Meeting the Needs of Others

Closely related to valuing time, U.S. Americans want you to get to the point and they believe in freedom of speech. It is difficult for Egyptian students to speak their mind because they believe it is not right to take charge and may be considered offensive and rude. Egyptian students perceive this behavior as too direct, indicating that context is more important than content. Respect for others and friendly communication at a leisurely pace is more important. Relationships are very important and saving face is a major concern. People can be very spontaneous and also live in the “here and now.”

It is important to foster a relationship and spend time with your student. Encourage your student and remember that he or she is miles away from home, in a totally new environment and may feel lonely and homesick.



Check in with your student regularly to find out how he or she is doing and if your student needs help with anything. It is important to continue to remind your student to be honest and clear about things.

Take your student places but also give him or her quiet time and privacy. It can be difficult for your student not to know anyone and hard to get used to new customs.

Speed versus Social and Family Connections

U.S. Americans generally believe that time is precious. As a result, they tend to plan on arriving early and not being late, even for good reasons. U.S. Americans value action and will often have a very busy schedule. As the saying goes, “work is a virtue, and idleness is a sin” to not be busy could be considered strange. Even routine, social or recreational activities are likely to be scheduled. Punctuality is of the utmost importance.

Egyptians tend to take a lighthearted approach to life and value humor. They are likely to perceive U.S. Americans as hurried, running from one thing to the next – unable to relax and enjoy themselves. To a new student, the pace of life may seem very rushed at first and it may be difficult for him or her to adjust. Egyptians are used to a slower pace, to a perception of time as being flexible and “loose” and to building social connections over time. They do not understand “the hurry.” Their accomplishments are achieved through interpersonal relationships and are not bound by the pressure of time. They feel that they have all the time in the world and what matters most is who you spend your time with, not how (see *Sense of Time*).



Take the opportunity to get to know Egyptian culture. Spend extra time with your student, cook an Egyptian dish and learn some of the language – become a little bit Egyptian.

Have fun being a language teacher. Spend some time helping your student learn English and praise him or her now and then.

When we set ourselves the task of coming to a better understanding of people and their culture it is helpful to identify their most basic beliefs and values. These beliefs and values shape their outlook on life and greatly influence their behaviors (see *Generalizations and Stereotypes*).

APPENDIX

Appendix A – References and Further Reading

AFS Host Family Handbook. New York, AFS Intercultural Programs, Inc., 2009.

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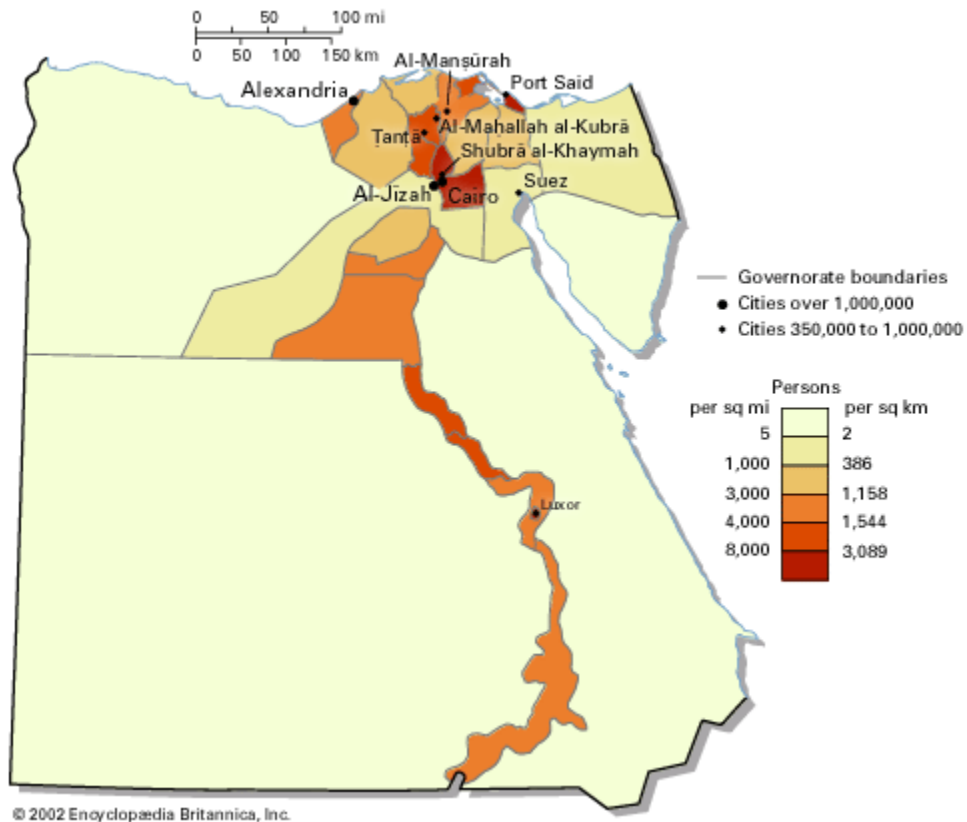
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Appendix B – Population Density of Egypt



Appendix C – A Brief History of Egypt

Egypt has a rich cultural history and has been influenced by many societies and civilizations. Egypt has had its own empire and been a part of others.



Not all students will be following the news, but if you does, set up alerts on Google News so that you are aware of ongoing events in the Middle-East.

The following is an excerpt from www.culturgrams.com. "Egypt." *CultureGrams Online Edition*. ProQuest, 2010. Web. 14 Jul 2010.

The earliest recorded Egyptian dynasty united the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt around 3000 BC. Today's Egyptians are proud of the Pharaonic heritage that followed. In 525 BC, Egypt came under Persian control. Alexander the Great's conquest in 332 BC brought Greek rule and culture to Egypt. As one of the first nations visited by Christian missionaries (the apostle Mark), Egypt was Christianized within three centuries and followed a Coptic patriarch. Because of Byzantine religious persecution, Egyptians welcomed the Muslim invasion that began in AD 642.

By the eighth century, Egypt had become largely Muslim. For centuries, it was ruled by successive Islamic dynasties, including the Ottoman Turks in the 16th century. France's Napoleon invaded in 1798, but Egypt was still associated with the Ottoman Empire until World War I.

France and Britain vied for influence over Egypt throughout the 19th century, during which time Viceroy Muhammad Ali successfully governed and reformed Egypt (1805–48). France and Britain exerted increasing control over Egyptian affairs after the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, and Britain made Egypt a protectorate in 1914. Although given official independence in 1922, the Egyptians regard 1952 as the beginning of their real independence. In that year, a revolution overthrew the British-supported monarchy. Gamal Abdel Nasser ousted the first president of Egypt in 1954 and became an influential leader and statesman. Nasser was responsible for a number of reforms, including land reform, universal education, nationalization of major industries and banks, and Egyptian leadership of the Arab world. He governed until his death in 1970.

During Nasser's tenure, Egypt fought two wars that involved Israel (1956 and 1967) and lost the Sinai Peninsula in 1967. Upon Nasser's death, Anwar el-Sadat became president. His government orchestrated a war (1973) in which Egypt regained a foothold in the Sinai. Sadat liberalized economic policy and signed a peace treaty with Israel (1979) that returned the Sinai to Egypt. In 1981, Sadat was assassinated by Muslim extremists who disagreed with his policies. He was succeeded by then vice president Hosni Mubarak.

Fundamentalists, led by the Islamic Brotherhood, began pressing in 1991 for an Islamic state that would shun Western art, music, literature, and values. They have pressed the secular government to restrict freedom of expression, liberal education, and secular law; have committed violent acts against Coptic Christians, Western tourists, and government installations; and have made assassination attempts. Although crackdowns have been harsh, this group remains the greatest threat to the government.

Egypt is recognized as a leader among Arab nations, both politically, culturally, and economically. Egypt was the first Arab nation to sign a peace treaty with Israel (1979). President Mubarak has taken an active role in the peace process with Israel. He also has reached out to former enemies, such as Sudan and Iran, to improve regional stability, though relations with Iran remain tense. Domestically, his government has reduced inflation, liberalized trade restrictions, moved to privatize state companies, deregulated some industries, and implemented other reforms that have led to economic growth. Mubarak was reelected to a fifth presidential term in September 2005. His government continues to steer a middle road that maintains Egypt's traditions while adapting to modernity.

Appendix D – Communication Activity

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

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

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

Why did you rank them in this order?

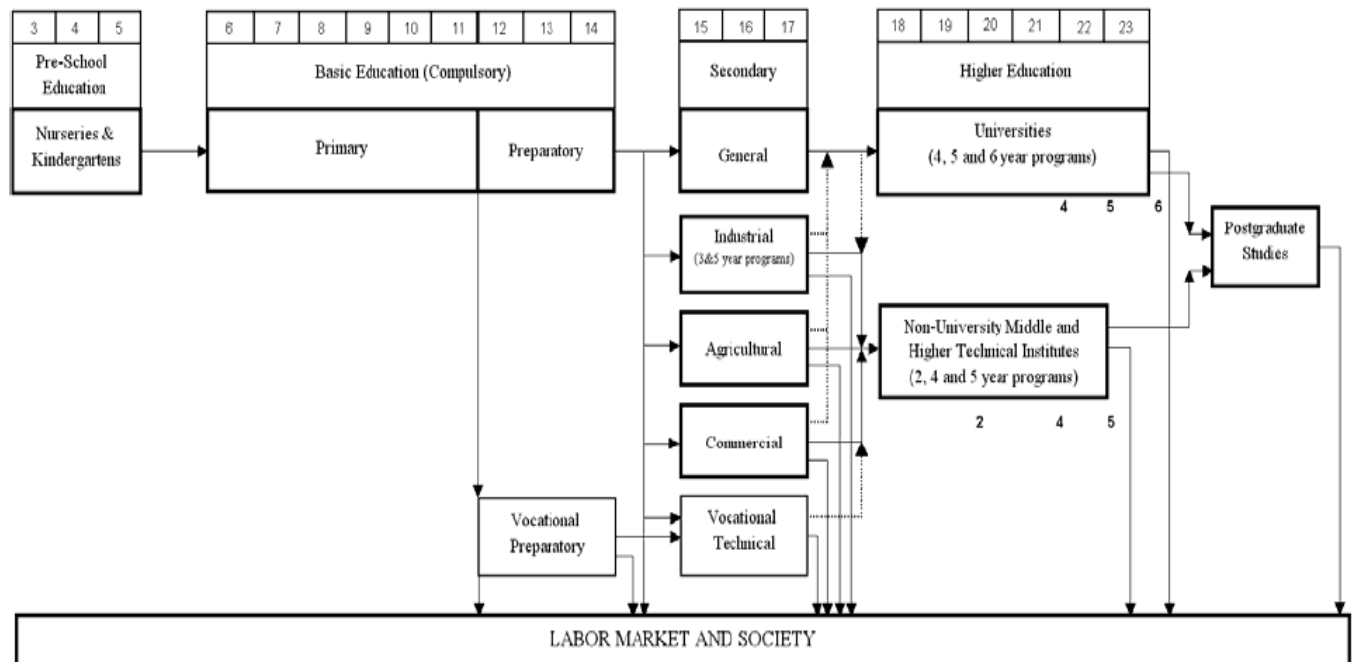
Record your answers here:

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

Take it a step further by asking other people whom you view as somewhat culturally different from you how they would respond and discuss your responses together. Remember, culture is not just determined by geography, it is also determined by factors such as age group, ethnicity, gender, shared context, level of ability. etc. (see *Generalizations and Stereotypes*).

Appendix E – Egyptian Education System

Arab Republic of Egypt: structure of the education system (2001)



Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2001.

Appendix F – YES Cultural Tip Sheet

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 times, which are religiously-dictated.</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 helpful to find out the direction Mecca is and not to disturb the student while praying. Many schools allow the</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>Going to church or mosques/ participating in host family’s religious services</p>	<p>students to use a corner of a room designated for “study hall” or a school counsellor’s office.</p> <p>Since wet floors in a bathroom may be seen as quite OK in the context many students are coming from, explanation of expectations regarding dry floors and using towels to soak up any water left on the floor would help them meet expectations in the host family’s home. Stepping inside the bathtub, rather than using the sink for the ablutions can help a lot.</p> <p>Students who use head covering make the decision to wear a veil on their own and will not view it as subservient (as is often interpreted in the West). They see the head covering as an essential element of their religious observance and are not embarrassed by. A frank and open conversation about their religion and the part the head covering plays in their observance can help to demystify it and even lead to some good discussions about what “modest” dress may mean to different communities.</p> <p>Keep the dog out of the student’s room and don’t expect the student to pet the dog; this does not mean the student cannot live with a dog; many students come to like their host family’s dog and overcome that fear.</p>
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			<p>Students can participate in religious services of host family; there is nothing wrong with attending a different religious service; however, host families should not force a student to attend church if they feel uncomfortable doing so.</p>
SOCIAL LIFE AND GENDER ROLES	<p>Many students come from more hierarchical societies where respect of elders is stressed and fathers may be dominant. They may also be used to segregation of males and females. These societies stress dependence on others and doing many things as a group, not as individuals. People are very socially minded and often have social gatherings. Relationships are extremely important and saving face is a major concern. People can be very spontaneous and live in the here and now.</p>	<p>Students may not be used to being independent and doing things on their own. Female dominance may be difficult for them. Touching of members of the opposite sex may be considered inappropriate whereas touching of same sex friends may not be an issue. Public appearances can be extremely important and there is a difference in public vs. private behaviours. Strong reliance on friends and families may result in what could be considered excessive communication with family and friends. Spontaneity can be interpreted as lack of planning or not being on schedule.</p>	<p>Understanding of these differences as well as an explanation of these differences are a first step. Modelling by elders or advice from friends could be very helpful. Giving students time to adjust and be mindful of differences in touching and space differences is helpful. Knowing that reliance on friends and family is very important and gaining trust is a prerequisite for building a relationship. It is important to know that relationship building may be slower than in the 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.</p>
COMMUNICATION STYLES	<p>Students are generally used to more indirect communication styles. That means they will not directly state what they think but will expect the listener to decipher the message and to find out what they really mean. Students rely on the context and on nonverbals to convey a message. It is also important to tell the listener what they think the listener wants to hear, and not to offend people, especially when they are in higher positions, so they can save face. It is also polite to refuse things that are offered (food, for example) with the</p>	<p>The indirect way of communicating and not directly stating what they really need, think, or want can lead to many misunderstandings - from confusion to a perception that the student is “lying” or “manipulative”. For example, a student will find it more acceptable to give vague answers or make excuses instead of saying “no”. They will also avoid direct confrontation at all cost and prefer to work through third parties who can mediate for them. Another tendency may be to exaggerate things, for several people to talk at the same time, or to get very loud and excited when they feel strongly about something (some Arab cultures). Other cultures may be very quiet (Asians, for</p>	<p>Know that what students say may not be what they really mean. It takes time to get to know the student and to build a trusting relationship. If the student thinks that you do not care for him or her by doing things for them, they may shut down and not be willing to do anything. They will say yes but have no intention of doing things because that is what they think you want to hear.</p> <p>Silence may not mean that they agree; in fact it may mean that they should not object and shows that they do not agree (again, being respectful). Open ended questions such as “why did you do this? are not productive; instead, closed statements followed by some silence may be better in getting students to open</p>

	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.	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.	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 intermediary (maybe a teacher or religious person). It helps to use stories or accounts of personal or other people’s experiences to get a point across (could be fictitious, too) without mentioning people by name to avoid embarrassment.
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 AND SPACE	Time is not as scheduled and more fluid in most of the YES countries. It is not as important to be on time. It may also not be common to plan things that will happen in the future. Personal space may not be as important and people could stand a lot closer during conversations.	Some students could be late or oversleep. They may want to stay up late. They may not be on time at school or for certain events the family is planning on. They may change their minds on whether or not they would like to do something or not openly state what they would like to do. Being physically close may make some people uncomfortable.	Students may need some time to adjust to a very 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. Will need to have an explanation on space differences and how people feel about it in different countries.
SCHOOL	School and studying may vary also. In some countries, there is a lot of	Students may have a difficult time adjusting to school and different expectations from teachers	It is definitely a good idea to contact the school and the teachers early and get progress reports. It may be a

	<p>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>and host families. Students who do little homework or little independent work after school in their own countries may be struggling in school. Due to the idea of saving face and indirect communication styles, they may state they have done their homework and school is going well when in fact it is not. Teachers who have not had experiences with people from other cultures could be misinterpreting behaviours and ways of approaching homework and classroom interaction. In Asian cultures it is not expected to criticize or disagree with what the teacher is saying; they may be very quiet in class. In other countries, the classroom may be very loud and students work a lot in groups.</p>	<p>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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Appendix G – Arabic Language Phrases

English Phrases

Hi!
Good morning!
Good evening!
Welcome! (to greet someone)
How are you?
I'm fine, thanks!
And you?
Thank you (very much)!
You're welcome! (for "thank you")
Good night!
Good bye!
Excuse me! (to pass by)
Just a little.
What's your name?
My name is ...
Nice to meet you!
لگتفرع مې
Oh! That's good!
How old are you?
Good luck!
Happy birthday!
Happy New Year!
Merry Christmas!
Happy Eid
Happy Ramadan
Congratulations!
Bless you (when sneezing)
Good night and sweet dreams!
Sorry (for a mistake)
What's That Called In Arabic?
Yes/ No
Here you go! (when giving something)
I love you!
One, Two, Three
Four, Five, Six
Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten

Arabic Phrases

Salam! مالس
Sabah el kheer ريخل حابص
Masaa el kheer ريخل اءسم
Marhaban اب حرم
Kaifa haloka/ haloki (female) ؟كل اح فيك
Ana bekhair, shokran! ارکش ريخب انأ
Wa ant? / Wa anti? (female) ؟تنأ و
Shokran (jazeelan) اليزج ارکش
Al'afw وفعلأ
Tosbeho/ tosbeheena (female) 'ala khair/ ريخ ىل ع ني حبصت / حبصت
Ma'a salama تمال سلأ عم
Alma'derah قرذ عملأ
Qaleelan! اليلق
Ma esmouk? Ma esmouki? ؟كمسإ ام
Esmee... !... يمسإ
Motasharefon/ motasharefatun (f) bema'refatek تفرشتم / فرشتم

Hada shay'un Jameel ليمج عيش اذه
Kam howa umruk? umroki (female) ؟كرم ع وه مك
Bettawfeeق قيفوتل اب
Eid meelad sa'eed! عيد عس داليم ديع
Sana sa'eedah! قدي عس قنس
A'yaad meelad Saeedah آدي عس داليم داي عأ
Eid mobarak! ؟كرابم ديع
Ramadan mobarak! ؟كرابم ناضمر
Mabrook! !كوربم
Rahimaka Allah مللأ كمحر
Laila sa'eda wa ahlaam ladida لذيذل مال حأ و قدي عس قليل
Aasef! !فسأ
Ma esmoho bel arabiah? ؟عيبرعل اب ممسأ ام
Na'am/ Laa ال / م عن
Khod! !دخ
Uhibbok/ uhibboki (female) كبحأ
wahed, ithnaan, thalatha (th as in think). قثالث, نانثأ, دحأ و
arba'a, khamsa, sitta قتس, قس مخ, ععبرأ
sab'a, thamania (th as in think), tis'a, 'ashara. قرشع, ععست, قينامث, ععبس