



# Handbook for Host Families of Indian Participants



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Acknowledgements.....</b>                | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Indian Culture Quiz .....</b>            | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Answers to Indian Culture Quiz .....</b> | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Foreword.....</b>                        | <b>7</b>  |
| Objectives of Handbook.....                 | 7         |
| Participant Selection Process.....          | 7         |
| <b>Overview .....</b>                       | <b>8</b>  |
| Geography.....                              | 8         |
| Climate .....                               | 8         |
| A Brief History .....                       | 8         |
| <b>Culture .....</b>                        | <b>10</b> |
| What is Culture? .....                      | 10        |
| The Cultural Iceberg.....                   | 10        |
| Generalizations and Stereotypes .....       | 12        |
| Culture & Perception .....                  | 14        |
| <b>Communication .....</b>                  | <b>16</b> |
| The English Language.....                   | 17        |
| Direct vs. Indirect .....                   | 17        |
| Decision Making.....                        | 19        |
| Formal and Informal .....                   | 19        |
| Manners.....                                | 20        |
| Greetings and Gestures .....                | 22        |
| Profanity.....                              | 23        |
| Conflict Resolution .....                   | 23        |
| <b>Family Life .....</b>                    | <b>24</b> |
| The Family Structure .....                  | 24        |
| Family Reputation .....                     | 25        |
| Family Roles .....                          | 25        |
| Features of a Typical Indian Home .....     | 29        |
| <b>Religion .....</b>                       | <b>34</b> |
| Holidays & Celebrations.....                | 34        |
| Hinduism .....                              | 35        |
| Islam.....                                  | 36        |
| Christianity .....                          | 38        |
| Sikhism .....                               | 38        |
| Jainism.....                                | 38        |
| Judaism .....                               | 39        |
| <b>Concept of Time.....</b>                 | <b>40</b> |
| Pace of life.....                           | 40        |
| <b>Concept of Space .....</b>               | <b>41</b> |
| Personal Space .....                        | 41        |
| Private vs. Public Space.....               | 42        |
| <b>Personal Relationships .....</b>         | <b>43</b> |
| Maintaining Relationships Back Home .....   | 43        |
| Making Friends.....                         | 44        |
| Gender and Relationships .....              | 45        |
| Accepting Differences .....                 | 45        |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Sex and Intimacy .....                                    | 46        |
| LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) .....          | 46        |
| <b>School &amp; Education .....</b>                       | <b>47</b> |
| Teacher/Student Relationships.....                        | 48        |
| English Language Proficiency .....                        | 48        |
| Daily and Weekly Schedule .....                           | 49        |
| Lunch at School .....                                     | 50        |
| Homework and Grades .....                                 | 51        |
| Parental Involvement.....                                 | 51        |
| Sports and Extracurricular Activities.....                | 52        |
| Clothing at School .....                                  | 52        |
| Muslim Students at School .....                           | 53        |
| Success in U.S. School .....                              | 53        |
| <b>Appendix A – References &amp; Further Reading.....</b> | <b>55</b> |
| <b>Appendix B – YES Program Overview .....</b>            | <b>56</b> |
| <b>Appendix C – Decoding Indian English.....</b>          | <b>57</b> |
| <b>Appendix D – YES Cultural Tip Sheet .....</b>          | <b>59</b> |

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# INDIAN CULTURE QUIZ

Perhaps you are already familiar with Indian 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. T/F - Ninety-five percent of Indians are Hindu.
2. T/F - Indians know English so it is easy to communicate with them.
3. T/F - Indian students are encouraged to learn through questioning.
4. T/F - Christians are allowed to openly practice their faith in India.
5. T/F - It is common in Indian schools for a student's grades to be read aloud.
6. T/F - Indian children are generally not as independent as most American children and will often live with their parents until they are married.
7. T/F - A typical Indian family will have three or more children.
8. T/F - Indian parents tend to have very strict rules at home and Indian children generally do not make decisions on their own.
9. T/F - Most Indian men wear turbans.
10. T/F - It is uncommon for Indian students to have a friend of the opposite sex.
11. T/F - Most Indian students express gratitude to their family by frequently saying, "Thank you."
12. T/F - Smoking marijuana in India is "no big deal".
13. T/F - If an Indian disagrees with an idea you propose, he/she will most likely be straightforward in telling you so.
14. T/F - Indians tend to hold fast to their own religions and most do not mix with Indians of a different faith.
15. T/F - The majority of Indians are very particular about time and are always punctual.
16. T/F - Most Indian children are not accustomed to performing household chores because they are expected to concentrate on their school work.
17. T/F - Indian children are generally used to taking long showers.
18. T/F - Everyday life in India is no longer affected by the caste system because it is now illegal.
19. T/F - A lot of Indian food is spicy and some of it has a curry flavor.
20. T/F - High school students in India do not drink alcohol.

## ANSWERS TO INDIAN CULTURE QUIZ

1. Ninety-five percent of Indians are Hindu.  
**False** - 80.5% of Indians are Hindu; 13.4% are Muslim, 2.3% are Christian, 1/9% are Sikh. Other religions include Buddhism and Jainism. (See Religion)
2. Indians know English so it is easy to communicate with them.  
**False** – Indians study English in school, but will have different accents and may speak rapidly. In addition, there are many stylistic differences in how they communicate with others. (See Communication)
3. Indian students are encouraged to learn through questioning.  
**False** – Indian students are encouraged to learn through memorization and not by asking questions. (See Schools)
4. Christians are allowed to openly practice their faith in India.  
**True** – Christians openly practice their faith all over India. There are significantly more Christians in the south of India, but Christian churches and congregations are found in all regions. (See Religion)
5. It is common in Indian schools for a student's grades to be read aloud.  
**True** – Unlike in the U.S. where grades are considered confidential, Indian students are accustomed to hearing their own grades and those of classmates read aloud. (See Schools)
6. Indian children are generally not as independent as most American children and will often live with their parents until they are married.  
**True** – Traditionally children live with their parents until they marry. Sons continue to live with their parents in most cases even after marrying. Some daughters move to the home of their husband. (See Family Life)
7. A typical Indian family will have three or more children.  
**False** – Although the typical Indian family is large, because of extended family living together, most Indian families have just one or two children. (See Family Life)
8. Indian parents tend to have very strict rules at home and Indian children generally do not make decisions on their own.  
**True** – It is the role of the parents to provide guidance and make decisions on behalf of the child on everything from school work to marriage partners. (See Family Life)
9. Most Indian men wear turbans.  
**False** – Only Sikhs wear turbans; Sikhs make up 1.9% of the Indian population. (See Religion)
10. It is uncommon for Indian students to have a friend of the opposite sex.  
**True** – Most Indian students will have friends of the same sex. (See Personal Relationships)

11. Most Indian students express gratitude to their family by frequently saying, "Thank you."  
**False** – Within Indian families, gratitude is expressed but is not always spoken with "Thank you." Indian students are far more likely to express gratitude by saying "Thank you" to someone outside of the immediate family. (See Communication)
12. Smoking marijuana in India is "no big deal".  
**False** – Smoking marijuana or ganja is illegal in India. Schools and families do not tolerate the possession or use of illegal substances on campus or at home. (See Personal Relationships)
13. If an Indian disagrees with an idea you propose, s/he will most likely be straightforward in telling you so.  
**False** – S/he will first avoid eye contact with you. S/he may also simply not respond or change the subject. (See Communication)
14. Indians tend to hold fast to their own religions and most do not mix with Indians of a different faith.  
**False** – In fact, Indians very comfortably interact with other Indians regardless of faith practice. (See Communication and Religion)
15. The majority of Indians are very particular about time and are always punctual.  
**False** – Indians tend to be more flexible about time and place greater emphasis on harmonious personal relationships than on punctuality. However, in some settings, time expectations are very strict. (See Time and Space)
16. Most Indian children are not accustomed to performing household chores because they are expected to concentrate on their school work.  
**True** - The typical Indian mother's duty is to provide the best care for her children. She will do the household chores herself or see that household servants do them before she takes time away from her children's attention to their school work. (See Family Life)
17. Indian children are generally used to taking long showers.  
**False** – Indian children understand that water is scarce. They take bucket baths with a limited amount of water for each bath. (See Family Life)
18. Everyday life in India is no longer affected by the caste system because it is now illegal.  
**True** – Such things as school assignment, jobs, housing are no longer affected by the caste system. However tension between classes can still be found in India. See Communication for more information.
19. A lot of Indian food is spicy and some of it has a curry flavor.  
**False** – Only some Indian food is spicy. Every region has its spicy and non-spicy food. (See Family Life)
20. High school students in India do not drink alcohol.  
**False** – Some students in India do drink alcohol but they do not drink it openly. The amount of alcohol consumed is probably much less than that consumed by American teenagers. Alcohol is very accessible and a student who has been drinking will spend the night away from home. (See Family Life)



## **FOREWORD**

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

### **Objectives of Handbook**

This Handbook for Host Families of Indian Participants is 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 Indian student's world view and will be able to provide culturally sensitive and appropriate support to both the hosted student and the host family.

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

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

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

### **Participant Selection Process**

If your student came to the U.S. on the YES Program he or she was selected by one exchange program but you as a host family may be participating through a different exchange program. A small percentage of the YES students will come from poorer communities where even basic modern amenities such as electricity and indoor plumbing are rare. Many of the YES participants and their parents may never have even left their own city before, let alone their own country. For more information on the YES Program, please see Appendix B.

If you are an AFS host family you may be hosting a non-YES student. Most of the students from India who are not on the YES program will be from middle class and higher income homes that will have most of the modern amenities familiar to families in the U.S., as well as having servants.



## OVERVIEW



*India is a land of contrasts, of some very rich and many very poor people, of modernism and medievalism...India is not a poor country. She is abundantly supplied with everything that makes a country rich, yet her people are very poor.*

**Jawaharlal Nehru**

India provides multiple measures of diversity. Whether one considers climate, religion, cuisine, language, customs, or ethnic groups, India stands out as a land of contrasts and at the same time, a country with room for everyone and every point of view. Despite its variations, India preserves a unique cultural heritage from its long established traditions. Rich in numerous art forms, India produces the highest number of films on an annual basis of any country in the world and Indian art and dance reflect the powerful religious influence found throughout the country. One must understand something of the various faiths practiced in India to appreciate the country's many forms of art and dance.

Population estimates in July 2010 were more than one billion people who are spread across 28 states and seven union territories. Though English may be considered the most important language for political and commercial communication, Hindi is the national language and mother tongue for 30% of the people. In addition there are 14 other official languages. Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati and Punjabi will be the primary language for most of the YES students.

### Geography

India, often referred to as a subcontinent, expands across more than one million square miles (three million square kilometers) and covers an area equivalent to one-third of the U.S.A. India's climate and economy is greatly impacted by the three major bodies of water surrounding more than half of India – the Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea – and a number of major rivers flowing through the country including the Ganges and Indus rivers.

### Climate

India as a whole is considered a tropical climate but in fact, there is much variation in climate and terrain throughout the country. Depending on the region of India, there could be monsoons, deserts, temperate regions or mountainous terrain up in the Himalayas. Temperatures range from sub-freezing in the Himalayas to tropical 113 degrees Fahrenheit in Mumbai, Bangalore, and Chennai. Rainfall varies between 27 inches in a single day to 4 inches in a year.

### A Brief History

India's rich history dates back approximately 5,000 years to one of the oldest civilizations in the world, the Indus Valley civilization. Aryan tribes arrived about 1500 B.C. later merging with the Dravidian inhabitants of the region. A series of incursions followed: the Arabs in the 8th century, the Turks in the 12th century and European traders in the late 15th century. By the 1800's, Britain was in control of nearly all of India.

Independence came in 1947 through nonviolent resistance led by Mohandas Gandhi (later renamed Mahatma Gandhi) and Jawaharlal Nehru. At that point, the separate countries of India and Pakistan were formed. An enormous dual exodus occurred with Muslims moving to Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs relocating to India. It is estimated that more than 10 million people changed sides. India and Pakistan still experience a strained political relationship in large part because of the dispute over Kashmir. Seventy-two percent of the population lives in rural areas and the remaining 28 percent live in

the cities. Recently, India has been active in using biogas and wind energy to compensate for its lack of fossil fuels. Today, India is the world's largest democracy.



YES students come from all over India. (Above is the most current map of India available.)

Image Source: [www.mapsofindia.com](http://www.mapsofindia.com)

# CULTURE

## 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, such as 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.

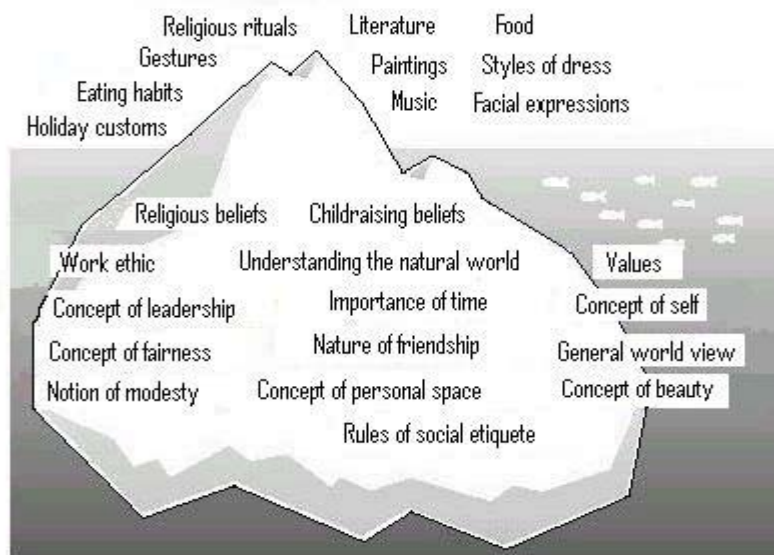
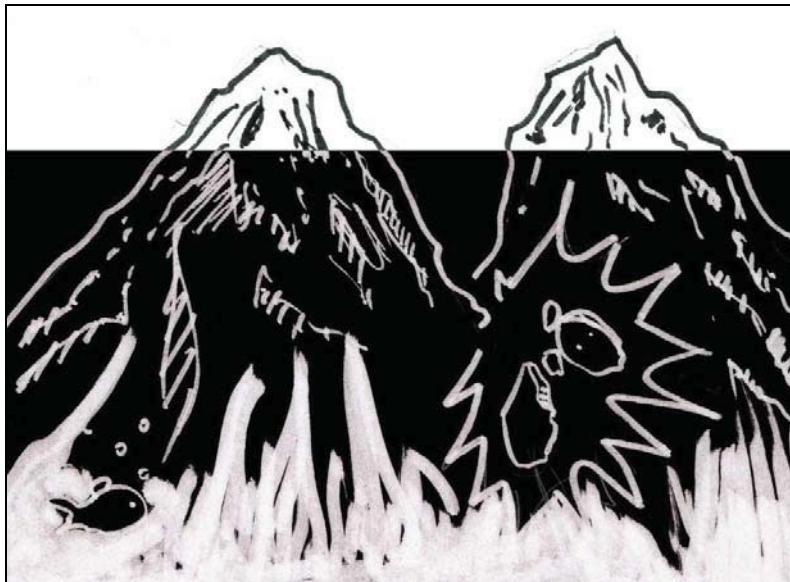


Image Source: <http://www.uop.edu/sis/culture/File/sec1-1-1h1.htm>

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](http://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 Indian 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.**

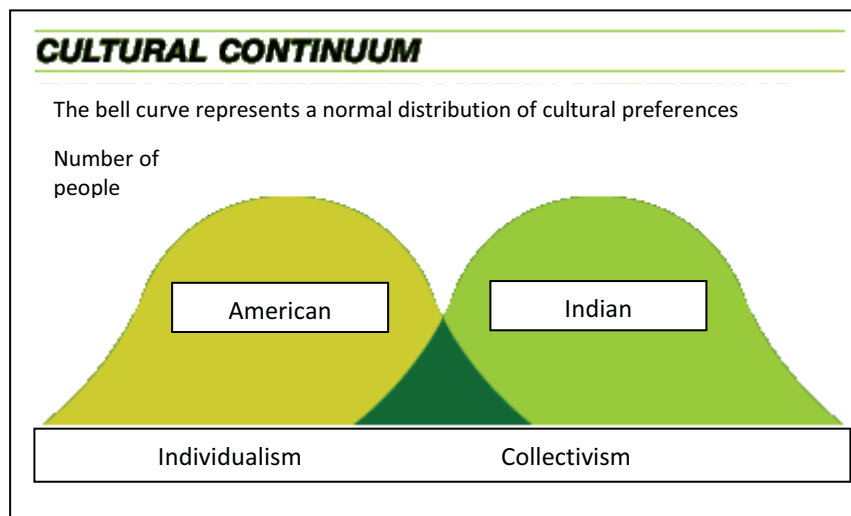
An example of a cultural generalization is the strongly held **U.S. American value of individualism**. U.S. Americans tend to like to do things themselves and see themselves as responsible for their own lives. These things are reflected in popular expressions such as “pulling yourself up by your own 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 bell curve graph that follows.

**Graph 1**



On the left side, **individualism** (emphasis on well-being of the individual) is displayed and on the right side is the Indian 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). Individualistic cultures are not focused on the interests of the group but emphasize mostly on their individual goals. People from

individualistic cultures tend to think more of themselves as individuals and as “I” distinctive from other people. They prefer clarity in their conversations to communicate more effectively and come in general directly to the point like the Americans do.



*It's better to say something pleasant than something true.*

**Indian Proverb**

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 Indian culture but some Indian 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.**

The shaded area shows how some U.S. Americans and Indian people may be more like each other on this trait than they are like the average U.S. American or Indian person. For example, a U.S. teen from a rural community might have more in common with an Indian 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.



*Our student grew up in a very rural area and had experience on his grandparents' farm so he fit right into our family and living arrangements. He had chores at home as well as our children having chores. We clearly talked about our expectations and asked him for input on anything he didn't understand.*

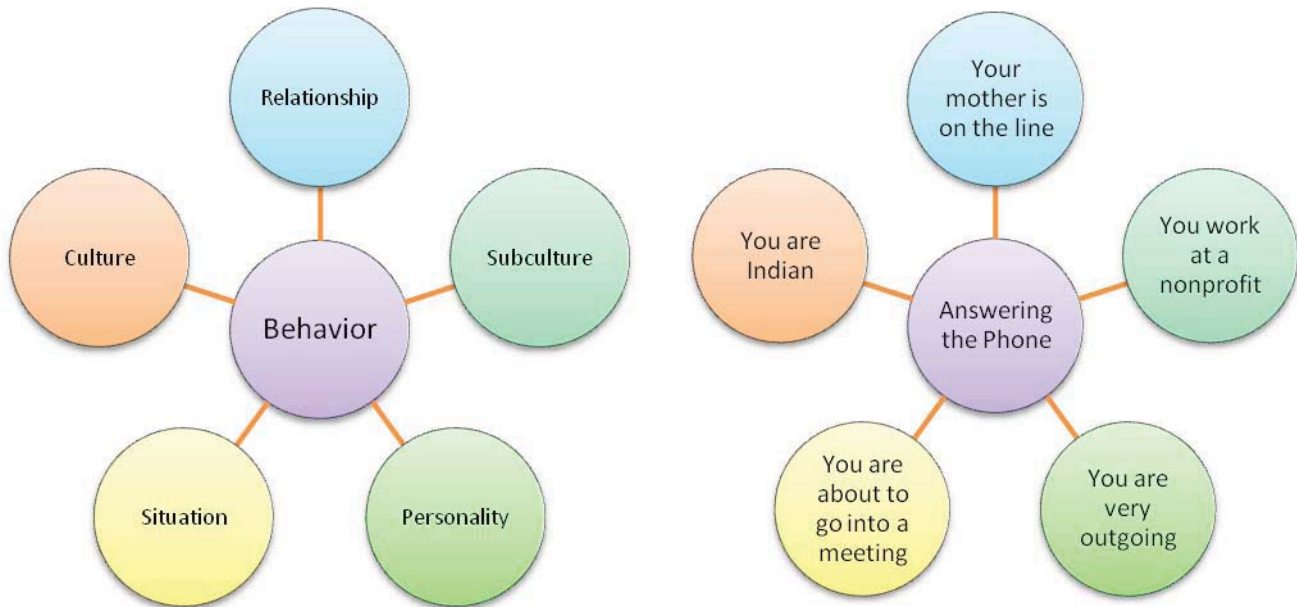
**U.S. Host Family**

Exchange students tend to be outside the norm for one or more cultural traits in comparison to their peers. Simply leaving one's family for a year to study abroad is highly unusual in Indian society. And acting as a host family is not very common in the U.S.! 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 that culture is not the only factor influencing behavior. People can differ in many other ways, such as their likes and dislikes, personalities, and life experiences (left-hand diagram in Figure 1 on the following page). 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 behavior**



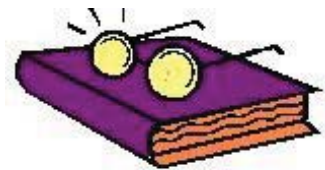
In the above scenario, an Indian person would most likely take the call and converse with his or her mother for several minutes (and her colleagues would not object or think it inappropriate), reflecting the strong family ties that are the norm in Indian (see Family Life). Change any factor in this situation 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 & 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 place great importance on speed, efficiency and getting a particular task done in a timely manner. This often comes at the expense of developing personal relationships. In the U.S. it may be acceptable in some work settings to have a polite but superficial relationship with one's work colleagues and to directly question those involved when things are not going as planned.



On the other hand, in India a more relaxed attitude toward time generally exists, and the norm is to strive to maintain harmonious relationships with those involved in a shared task. For example, it would be a sign of disrespect to those present to cut one meeting short for the sole purpose of being on time for another. This is changing somewhat, however, in Delhi and other large cities in India, where the digital age and other influences have resulted in a new generation of multi-tasking, iPhone savvy urbanites, the likes of which can be found in any major city in the U.S. or abroad.

### **How might these differences play out in your hosting experience?**

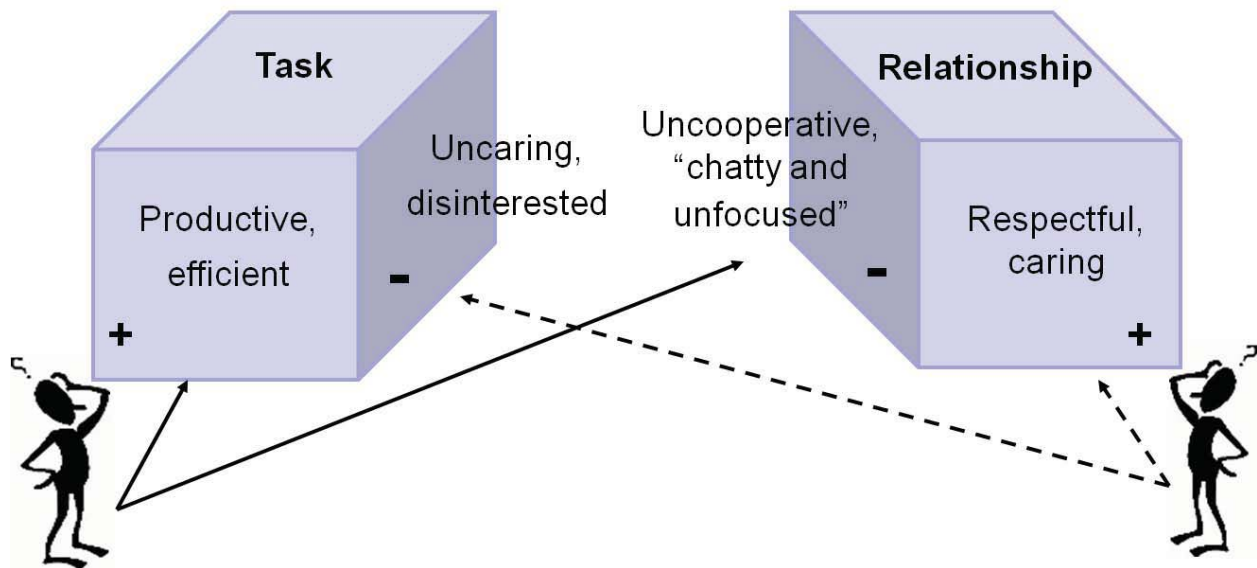
Here is one possible scenario:

*Saturdays are 'chore days' in your household. Everyone in the family is assigned a specific task that they are responsible for, and once everyone has completed theirs the family does a fun afternoon activity together. This Saturday the plan is to go for a bike ride to a park, where you plan to have a picnic. You assign everyone in the family their chores for the morning: your daughter is to vacuum, you will wash and fold laundry, your husband will clean out the garage, and your Indian student will dust the furniture. The goal is to have everything accomplished by 11 a.m. in order to go for the bike ride and end up at the park to have a picnic lunch by 12:30 p.m. By 9 a.m. everyone is working on assigned tasks and off to a good start. At 10 a.m. you check in on everyone and notice your Indian student is in the garage with your husband, and they are talking about the events of the week. You ask him if he has finished dusting the furniture, to which he replies he has not yet started. You politely remind him of the schedule that your family is hoping to follow, and he retreats into the house. A half hour later you check in on your daughter, who is vacuuming the last room in the house, while talking with your Indian student. Once again you ask if he has finished with his chore, and once again he says no. You are beginning to feel agitated and don't understand why it is so difficult for him to focus on completing a simple task. You tell him that he is not allowed to talk to anyone until he has finished dusting the furniture, and remind him that the family would like to depart in a half hour, but the chores must be completed first. He agrees to hurry, but you can tell that he seems hurt by your remarks. At 11:15 you have the picnic packed and the bikes ready to go. You head into the house to check on everyone, and are pleased to see the chores are completed. Your family heads out on the afternoon adventure, however your Indian student seems sullen the entire day.*

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

What other value differences are influencing the situation? (See Family Life, Sense of Space and Sense of Time)

**Figure 2**  
**Task vs. Relationship Value Orientation**



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

## COMMUNICATION



*To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world, and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.*

**Anthony Robbins**

There is absolutely nothing more important in a hosting experience than learning how to effectively communicate with your student, and possibly no bigger challenge than achieving this goal. The first step is to identify your own communication style, and recognize that of your Indian student. Only in doing so will you avoid common frustrations and misinterpretations.

In order to identify the differences between your student's and your own style of communication, it helps to recognize the cultural values that shape them. In the U.S., individualism is the dominant value, while collectivism is the dominant value in India. Although your hosted student is likely to follow the Islamic faith, Hinduism is the dominant faith in India. Therefore, the prevalence of some Hindu values influence Indian society as a whole, making the following prominent traditional cultural values also worthy of noting:

**Anonymity:** focus on how the group is affected, rather than on individual successes or mistakes

**Collaboration:** understand one's role in the group

**Harmony:** avoid conflict and preserve sense of peace and equality

## The English Language

English is one of the official languages in India; however this does not mean you should assume your student will speak perfect English upon arrival to your home. Your Indian student may not come from a family where "good English" is spoken, and thus, your student might have a steep learning curve to improve rapidly (see Schools and Education).



**Coach your student to speak slowly and clearly, and help him/her with the correct pronunciation of English words.**

Your Indian host son or daughter might not feel comfortable admitting that s/he does not understand something in English, and might feel that s/he should be able to figure it out on his/her own. Be sure to create an environment in which your student will feel comfortable asking for clarification if needed.



**Check in with your student's teachers at school and alert them that your student might need extra attention, especially during the first couple of months. If your student is non-participatory it might indicate that s/he might not be able to follow classroom discussion and could benefit from extra tutoring.**

## Direct vs. Indirect



**Direct communication is like "reading the headlines."  
Indirect communication is like "reading between the lines."**

In general, Americans use a **direct** communication style, or "tell it like it is." This is largely based on the American values of individualism and freedom of self expression. Because of the emphasis on preserving relationships and harmony in India, Indians typically use an **indirect** communication style in which the meaning must be derived from other factors, including the context of situation, relationship between the individuals, and **non-verbal cues**.



*He always seemed to give us the answer he thought we wanted to hear.*

**U.S. Host Family**

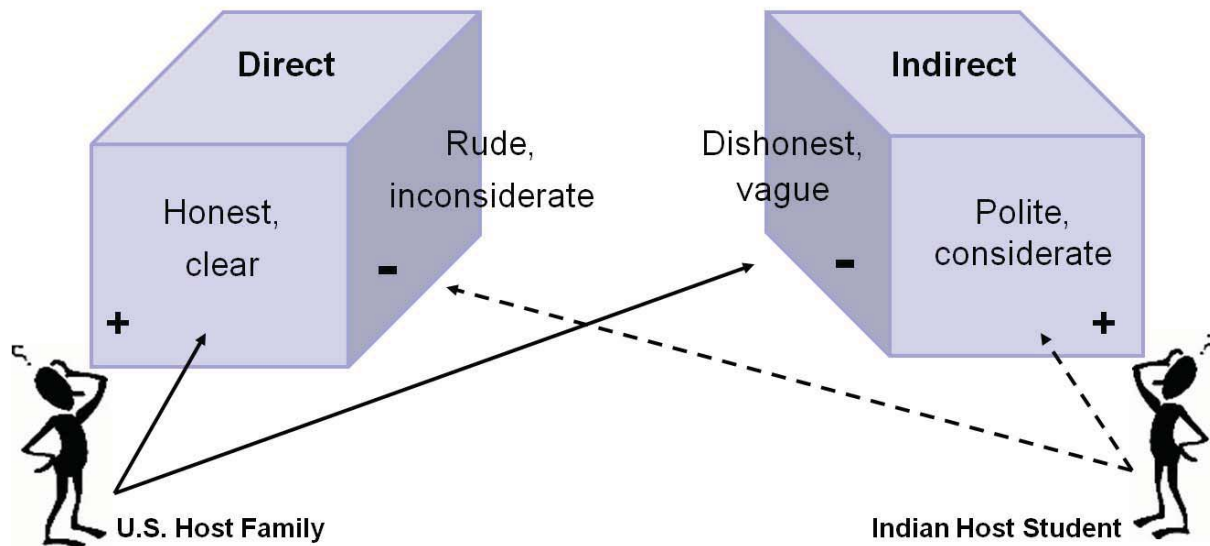
*Our son spoke very directly to us. He was never overly direct where we were offended.*

**U.S. Host Family**

In an effort to be polite and respectful, at first, your Indian student may be more indirect in his/her communication style than from that which you are used to. You will need to listen carefully to your student and watch for non-verbal cues. 'Yes' may actually mean 'no,' and your student likely will not speak up if they feel uncomfortable or offended. Family members should approach the student with curiosity, asking specific questions about his or her experiences, and coaching him or her in providing honest, direct answers in order to help him or her develop a greater level of comfort in doing so.

Figure 3

## Direct vs. Indirect Communication Style



### What means 'no'?

- ❖ Silence
- ❖ Averting the eyes
- ❖ Hesitation before answering
- ❖ Avoiding response to the question
- ❖ Changing the subject

There are cues that you can look for that indicate your student might mean “no” even if the answer stated was “yes.” For example, if you ask a question to which your student hesitates before answering, you can assume that s/he might not be in support of the idea. Your student might also avoid the question and change the topic. If any of these occurs, try proposing alternative options to see if you get a different reaction. If you do, point it out and encourage your student to speak up if something is unfavorable to them. It might take some coaching, but practice will enable your student to feel more comfortable saying ‘no.’



*I would recommend that the host parents stress to their child to ask many questions. I have noticed that the kids like to say yes to everything even if they really don't understand.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**Ask your student a lot of questions. Indian children are generally used to having their parents show a great deal of interest in their lives, and might misinterpret host parents who do not ask questions about their daily experiences as uncaring.**

You might find it useful to have a discussion each evening with your student to review the events of the day. Ask what did not go well in addition to what did. This will allow your student the opportunity to practice expressing him/herself more directly and address concerns before they potentially escalate into larger issues.

## Decision Making

In typical Indian families, parents have complete authority in making decisions for their children, and it is considered inappropriate for children to argue against decisions made by their parents. (See Family Life)



*Our student wanted a lot of family discussion about things before making a decision, compared to our natural children, who would have made some of these decisions more independently.*

**U.S. Host Family**

*Our student was very reserved and not very forthcoming as far as things he wished to do and foods he wanted.*

**U.S. Host Family**

Typically, Indian children are used to being given less independence than American children. They seek guidance from their parents for making important decisions, like choosing which subjects to take in school or which career path to follow. Indian children may be consulted about everyday decisions, like what to have for dinner, but their suggestions are not always honored. In India, most high school students go to school by themselves and are allowed to go out in the evenings and participate in extracurricular activities only after receiving permission from their parents.



**American teenagers are given much more freedom in decision-making than Indian teenagers, which will likely be difficult for your student to adapt to. Don't be surprised if your student approaches you for guidance in making seemingly insignificant decisions, and be open to talking through and weighing the different options with him or her in order to help your student feel comfortable making decisions on his or her own.**

## Formal and Informal



*We found him to have more respect than most American children do for adults.*

**U.S. Host Family**

As a sign of respect, children never address adults by their first names. Almost always, children will address anyone elder to them with a formal title (Sir or Madam, Mr. or Mrs.), or as 'Auntie' or 'Uncle.' It might be uncomfortable at first for Indian students to address you as anything different. Be clear and upfront with your student as to how you would like to be addressed.



**Most Indian students will prefer to address host parents as 'Mom' and 'Dad', and prefer not to address them by first names. By doing so, they will feel more like a part of the family rather than a guest. If you feel comfortable with your host son or daughter addressing you as 'Mom' or 'Dad' let them know from the very beginning.**

Your student might also be confused by the informal nature by which students interact with each other. In your evening discussions, ask if there was any language that was unfamiliar to your student that could use further explanation. Especially the use of satire and humor by Americans might cause confusion to your hosted student.



*At first he was also confused by the way my son and his group of friends joked around with each other. Some of it was that he didn't understand the slang and didn't know what or who they were talking about.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**Explain to your student that Americans tend to act very informally, and provide examples of what is appropriate and inappropriate around friends, teachers, and parents. Ask him or her overtly if there were any words or phrases that s/he heard that day that did not make sense to them, and offer an explanation.**

## **Manners**



*I noticed our student posed requests like commands. She mentioned in her culture it was impolite and rude to thank a family member.*

**U.S. Host Family**

### ***"Please" and "Thank You"***

Saying 'please' and 'thank you' is not emphasized as exercising good manners in India. As everyone in the family and within the community is fulfilling a role, it is perceived as one's sense of duty to do what is requested of them. Instead of saying 'please,' politeness is expressed in the way in which the request is asked. For example, if a child says 'Drive me to the movies, Auntie,' simply using the term 'Auntie' expresses endearment and respect for the person being addressed.



**Don't be offended if your student does not use "please" when making a request or say 'thank you', especially in the beginning. Instead, explain to your student that these are terms used to express gratitude and respect in American society, and help your student practice using them.**

Similarly, saying 'thank you' is considered unnecessary in Indian culture since doing things for others is one's duty and does not require special acknowledgement. Even in the practice of receiving a gift from a friend or family member, in Indian culture the one giving the gift benefits as much as the recipient. Additionally, when a gift from a good friend or family member is worthy of mention, simply saying 'thank you' is inadequate. Gratitude may be expressed in other ways, such as in the form of a blessing. On the contrary, it is customary for Indians to thank people with whom they are unfamiliar for a gift.



**Opening a gift in front of the person who gave it to you is awkward and not typically done in Indian culture. Invite your student to open a gift if desired, but don't be surprised if he or she is uncomfortable with the idea. Simply explain that this is customary practice in American culture, and that the giver is often excited to see the recipient's reaction when opening the gift.**



*Our student from India was one of the kindest, most patient people I have ever met. I think I am a better person from having learned by observing.*

**U.S. Host Family**

Indians are generally very friendly people, and have strong ties to their friends and family, however the habit of constantly striking up superficial conversation, or 'small talk' with people they do not know is uncommon in India. Your student might at first be uncomfortable with people approaching him or her in public places to make small talk, and might not understand why you show a particular interest in people with whom you don't have a relationship.

### ***Staring***

In the U.S. we are taught from childhood that staring is impolite. On the contrary, it is acceptable in India for people to stare at anything that is out of the norm, different, or interesting to them. In order to avoid your student from unintentionally offending someone, be sure to explain that staring at others in the U.S. is considered rude.



**Explain to your student that striking up friendly conversation with people you don't know in public places such as the grocery store, shopping mall, parks, etc. is considered a form of being courteous in the U.S.**

**Inform your student that staring at others is interpreted as exhibiting poor manners in the U.S., and ask him/her to make a conscious effort not to stare at others even if s/he finds their appearance, actions, or behaviors are foreign, confusing, or interesting to them.**

### ***Taboo Topics***

Just as in U.S. society, wherein certain topics are 'taboo' and should be avoided in certain situations or in certain company, there are specific topics that are also avoided in India. Striking up conversation with your Indian student about politics, accusations of government corruption in India, India-Pakistan relations, caste, or perceived poverty in India might cause your student to grow uncomfortable and silent. If you notice this type of reaction, change the subject and only revisit the topic(s) if your student initiates the discussion.



**Avoid these sensitive topics of discussion with your Indian student:**

- ❖ **Politics**
- ❖ **Government corruption**
- ❖ **India-Pakistan relation**
- ❖ **Caste**
- ❖ **Poverty**

**Don't be surprised if your student asks you or others direct questions about which religion you follow and about your faith, as this topic is freely discussed in Indian society. If you are uncomfortable discussing your religion with your student, politely say so and explain that some people in the U.S. prefer to keep their religious beliefs and practices private.**



## Greetings and Gestures



### **Namaskar:**

*I honor the Spirit in you which is also in me.*

Wherein “assalaamu ‘alaykum” is the standard Muslim greeting, and “sat sri akal” is that among Sikhs, “namaskar” or “namaste” is the most traditional form of Hindu salutation or greeting in Indian culture. However, it is not commonly used in daily interactions, especially after the first greeting and in urban areas. The word is accompanied by a bow to the other person with palms of both hands pressed together in front of the chest. Its meaning is to recognize the divinity or Spirit in all of us, and to show respect without physically touching the other person.



**Your student might not feel comfortable shaking hands or hugging, especially at first, as these gestures are not typical in Indian society. Respect is shown by a slight bow to the other person, without touching.**



*Our student was not used to informal socializing with peers of the opposite sex. Boys and girls are separated more in their culture, and it was surprising to him to see physical touching and affection between teens in public here in the U.S.*

**U.S. Host Family**



Generally speaking, gestures involving touching another person aren't socially acceptable in Indian society, and those that are tend to be gender specific. It is rare to see a man and a woman, even if married, hugging, kissing, or holding hands in front of other people. However, it is common to witness close male friends holding hands with each other, or putting their arms over each other in public. This is not true of couples, or men and women who have a platonic relationship. It's important to keep this in mind in order to respect your student's perception of touch and personal space.



**If your family is used to expressing love for one another by hugging, check with your student before approaching him or her until s/he warms up to the idea.**

American teenagers tend to incorporate touch in their interactions with one another. Public displays of affection are not common in Indian society, so your student might be uncomfortable with the level of physical interaction among peers at school.



**Be sure to ask your student questions about differences in relation to peer interactions at school, and encourage your student to ask questions about anything seemingly different or confusing.**

Another common gesture among Indians is the head nod, or head bobble. It's a side to side tilt of the head, and is a form of active listening in Indian culture. It might seem confusing to you at first, but keep in mind that the meaning of the gesture is to signify that your student is listening to you, agreeing with what you are saying, or is processing what is being said even though it might look as a sign of disagreement.



*The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said.*

**Peter F. Drucker**

## **Profanity**

Some words with a negative or profane connotation in America are commonly used among peer groups in India as acceptable expressions without intended offense (though these words would never be used in front of teachers, parents or elders). Specifically, 'shit' and 'damn' are often freely used in Indian daily conversation and are not considered swear words unless used in an intentionally derogatory manner. For example, it's common for one to say 'Your shoes are damn nice' in India without thinking twice about the use of the word 'damn.'



**Explain to your student that the use of words 'Shit' and 'Damn' in the U.S., even if unintentional, can be interpreted as being offensive. Monitor and correct your student if any expressions are used that have profane connotations, and explain when use of such words is appropriate. Encourage your student to use alternative expressions (See School and Personal Relationships).**

## **Conflict Resolution**



*Set ground rules beforehand and explain things in detail.*

**U.S. Host Family**

*True happiness consists in making others happy.*

**Bharavi's Kiratarjuniya, Hindu**

When conflict arises between you and your Indian host son or daughter, be sensitive in your approach to the situation. In order to effectively get through to your student, be cognizant of how you explain your position and be sure to offer plenty of detail as to why things are done a certain way and/or are acceptable or not. Indian students are used to being dealt with firmly, yet gently, and are not used to being reprimanded in front of others.



When there is a problem, take your student aside; talk to him or her privately and be gentle yet firm. Explain how things are done in the U.S. and recognize that it might be different than what your student is used to in India. Be as thorough in your explanation as possible but be sure not to correct your student in front of others.

## FAMILY LIFE

If there is one section of this handbook that is a “must-read” for host families this is the one! This section is designed to help you develop an understanding of your Indian student's family-life culture to help make your experience transitioning your student into your family go as smoothly as possible.



*...in India [our student] was revered as special and kept on a pedestal... It was very challenging [to get him] to pull his weight on the chores.*

**U.S. Host Family**

Common complaints, such as that reflected in the quote above, about Indian students have arisen from host families being unprepared for the extreme differences between the typical family values of Americans and those of the Indians. An introduction to these differences can help the host family understand their student's behavior and expectations, and thus aid the families in helping their student adjust to the American family-lifestyle. With this understanding, everyone can enjoy learning from each other.

With a country that is 1/3 the size and 4 times the population of the U.S., and with an ancient and rich cultural and linguistic diversity (see **Overview**), one can easily see how generalizing a typical Indian or Indian lifestyle would be next to impossible.

Even with this diversity, there is one way to generalize the typical Indian family. ***The family is the most sacred and important institution in India.*** Strong, traditional family values are still held by most Indian families despite the rapid socioeconomic changes that have developed in India in the past decade.



### The Family Structure

Traditionally, Indians live in extended families, and this is still commonly found in rural communities. Most often, children will not move away from home until marriage. Generally after marriage, a daughter will move immediately in with her new husband. Sons, typically, will raise their families in the same household as their parents. If the parents have one or more sons, the extended family can become quite large in comparison to what we are used to in the U.S. These large extended families can give the illusion that Indians have many children. But the facts show that most modern Indian families have only one or two children, simply out of economic practicality.



*Our student was quite engaging and "funny." He liked to be center of attention and was accustomed to being cared for by a large extended family.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**Your student may miss having grandparents living with the family. Feel free to introduce your student to any of your parents and/or grandparents who may live nearby. Your student may enjoy spending the day with them.**

Indian children are generally not accustomed to being alone at home. Typically they are used to being supervised and having an adult at home with them. Being left alone may be challenging at first for your student, leaving him/her with feelings of loneliness and uncertainty.



**It will be important to have an adult or responsible child at home with your student until s/he has adjusted to more independence. If this is not possible, arrangements could be made for him/her to visit with relatives or friends until someone is home.**

## **Family Reputation**

Family means everything in Indian culture, including personal reputation. Unlike typical families in American society where individualism is encouraged and each family member establishes his/her own reputation, there is little room for individualism in Indian society. It is the family's reputation that is always considered in India. Each family member is not concerned with his or her own reputation, but rather that of his or her family. So if one member of the family behaves poorly, this spoils the entire family's reputation.

Along with this sense of familial reputation comes reluctance on the teen's part to discuss troubling issues within the family with any other family member. If your student feels upset by someone in your family, s/he may not want to discuss or argue about this with anyone in your family. Your student will feel more comfortable speaking to a third party, but not in any specific detail.



**If you notice that your student is showing signs of distress with anyone in your family, please be sure to communicate with your student's local contact if your student is reluctant to talk about it. The local contact should make clear to your student that s/he is there for non-judgmental support, and that the student needs to communicate what is troubling him/her.**

Needless to say, the Indian family does all it can to ensure their good reputation is upheld in society, with each member carrying out specific roles to ensure that both the elderly and children receive the best possible care the family can provide.

## **Family Roles**

In India, typically the father is the king and provider. It is his role to earn the major portion of the family's income. He is also the authority figure of the household, enforcing the rules and carrying out the discipline.

*Her home life was very patriarchal; in her home her mother's input was never considered.*



**U.S. Host Family**

*Point out the equality of family members in expressing opinions and that each member has strengths and weaknesses (if this is true for your family). Both the women and men make decisions and are considered capable.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**Explain to your student how, in American families, parents nurture their children through helping them gain more independence and self-sufficiency.**

**Teach your student early the equality that both sexes share in American society. Explain how both father and mother are respected as the rulers of the household and carry out the discipline.**

**Tailor your explanations to reflect your family's values. Be patient, it may take time for your student to get used to these new values.**

In an Indian home, the **mother** is usually the caregiver and homemaker. The women in the home, especially the mothers, are expected to provide the proper care to the children (and elderly, if needed). It is her job to ensure the children are happy, healthy, fed, clothed, and properly educated.

Examples of how an Indian mother cares for her children cannot be overstated. The mother will have all the meals and snacks prepared and ready for the children, often with the foods that the children like. She will do most of the shopping, clean the house, and, without fail, be right *by her children's side* after school asking them about their day and helping them with their homework.

If the child is sick, the mother will either stay home with him/her and cater to all the child's needs or have someone available to do that for her. If the child is sick at exam times, the mother may accompany her child to school just for the exam period. **The children are *never* left alone at home when sick.** If the mother is not home, she makes sure that someone – a relative or neighbor – will be home for her children. In India, there are very few “latch-key kids”. In short, the mother ensures everything is done for her children.



*Our exchange daughter did not have chores in her home. Her mother did almost every routine thing for the family, including packing her luggage, cleaning, and doing laundry.*

**U.S. Host Family**

**The children** in an Indian family have specific roles and expectations.

**Education** is a foremost expectation for the children. The child's role is to go to school, come home, and study. As the **Schools** section of this handbook will later detail, education is carried out differently than it is in the U.S., and it is taken very seriously in the Indian household.



**Be vigilant with following through with your students' school assignments and asking about their day until s/he clearly demonstrates his/her self-sufficiency. This is important. If this is not done, the student may think his family does not care, and may feel no motivation to study.**

**Most Indian children are not used to making their own choices or decisions.** They are used to having their parents do everything for them. It can help to offer two or three choices, at first, to help develop this skill.

The children are generally not expected to carry out any daily chores, cooking, shopping, or cleaning outside of picking up after themselves. In fact, most Indian children have no experience with chores, especially, in the kitchen. This is due to the fact that most of their time is spent on educational

activities. Of the Indian students that do have some training in chores, it is usually the girls more so than the boys.



*Strongly encourage the use of a daily planner that you monitor regularly. Every homework assignment and its due date should be recorded and followed up with. Praise good behavior, but stay after them for accountability--they will thank you in the long run!*

**U.S. Host Family**

*...we learned that he had never done dishes in his life before coming here. He and his family have servants at home, and he didn't have household chores in the same way...*

**U.S. Host family**



**Spend time training your student how to do the basic chores we take for granted. Don't assume s/he will know how to do simple chores like rinsing off dishes, setting the table, or sweeping the floor.**

**Closely supervise your student in the kitchen while training him/her with the different kitchen appliances and kitchen safety rules.**

In Indian households, there usually are strict rules for the children. If the child plans to go out with friends, s/he must inform the family as to where, when, with whom, for how long, and what they plan on doing. Where they may hang out at the malls, they are rarely given enough money to shop for themselves – only enough for some snacks. You may find your student not knowing how to manage his/her money, or how to shop.



#### **Helping with Money Management**

- ❖ **Spend time helping your student learn how to manage his/her money.**
- ❖ **Help your student open a bank account and teach him/her how to keep the account balanced.**
- ❖ **Encourage your YES student to spend his/her stipend money prudently.**

For YES students, their stipend money may be the most money they have seen in their lives, and may be reluctant to spend it. Keep in mind that the State Department mandates that the stipend money is for the student's expenses in the U.S., not for saving to take home!



*He wasn't sure about asking for things he might need, like a hair cut or clothes for school. He wasn't sure how he was supposed to use his stipend money. Should he pay for things or should the host family pay? He would usually let us pay for things unless I suggested he pay for it. It would have been better to have guidelines set up at the beginning of his stay.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**Clearly define and understand who is expected to cover the different expenses associated with your student's stay. Do this right at the start and help your student hold to those expectations.**



### Other expectations of and for the children:



*He expected to be waited on...*

**U.S. Host Family**

*His expectation was that the women should know what his needs are and he should not have to ask for specific preferences.*

**U.S. Host Family**

*We had to help him understand that we are more self-reliant in the U.S. and he would need to express his needs and wants in a respectful manner, but he would need to let us know what he needed--especially in regard to food and personal hygiene needs.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**Explain to your student that, in the U.S., the children are expected tell their family what their needs are and to be able to make their own choices on certain things. Have patience during this period. Frequently spell out to your student what the expectations of everyone in your household are.**

In India, most middle to upper income households will have one or more **servants** living with the family. Having servants is not necessarily a sign of wealth, as it is here in the U.S. Families that can afford them may have their own drivers, cooks, and maids. The servants are generally of lower income, and it is a gesture of goodwill to employ as many servants as the family can afford. So it may often be that these servants will take on the women's chores other than studying with the children. This can allow the mother to find work outside the home as well. Though her duty is still to ensure that either she or the servants are keeping the household running as it should and everyone is cared for.



*Assign specific chores, and teach how things are done in your home. Explain how each family member is expected to contribute to keeping the household running smoothly. It is not the mother's role in our home to do all the housework.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**Help your student understand that most U.S. homes do not have servants and that helping with household chores is an important expectation, not considered demeaning, but highly respectable.**



## Features of a Typical Indian Home

### Demographics

Only 30% of Indians live in the metropolitan areas and the remaining 70% live in rural communities. These homes may be flats, apartments, or individual houses. **Your student may be from middle class and higher income homes** that will have most of the modern amenities we are familiar with here in the U.S., as well as having servants. **Some students come from poorer communities** where even basic modern amenities such as electricity and indoor plumbing are rare. Some students and their parents may never have even left their own city before, let alone their own country. In these cases, it may be a source of embarrassment for the student to talk about his/her home.



**Please do not push the subject if you notice your student avoiding any details about his/her life back in India.**

### Privacy

As the section on Time and Space will later detail in this handbook, privacy is not something regarded as highly as it is here in the U.S. No room in the Indian home is considered private, outside of the bathroom. It is seldom that you will find a lock on any of the rooms.



*They live in much smaller quarters, sharing space with grandparents as well as siblings & parents.*

### The Bathroom

Bathrooms in India are what are found typically throughout Southern Asia. The toilet is flush with the floor with foot pads on either side. Toilet paper is not generally used. Instead, Indians will use water to clean-up with afterward using either a pitcher of water or a nearby hose or sprayer. In fact, most Indian bathrooms are completely tiled and are almost always wet. A wet bathroom is considered a clean bathroom. Because water is commonly rationed for each household, baths are taken using the water that will fill a single one or two gallon pail. Showers use more water, and are not used that frequently unless the family is wealthier. There are no tubs; rather bathing is usually done in the central area of the bathroom.



**U.S. Host Family**



*Our student couldn't even keep the shower curtain in the shower and kept flooding the bathroom floor. My husband finally taped the curtain in place.*

**U.S. Host Family**

Hindu Indians will take baths every morning before offering prayers at their **puja**. Because there are no showers in Indian schools, the children are used to bathing again after school and sports. Deodorants and perfumes are not typically worn by children because they are too expensive.



#### **Help your Student Adjust:**

- ❖ Teach your student how to use your bathroom, including the shower and use of toilet paper. Remind him/her of how Americans prefer to keep our bathrooms dry.
- ❖ Teach your student right away what is appropriate to flush down the toilet.
- ❖ Frequently supervise and remind your student of the bathroom rules until s/he has adjusted and shows no more confusion about them.
- ❖ If body odor is an issue, show your student to use a deodorant, as s/he may not have used one at home before.



#### ***The Puja***

80% of Indians are Hindu; in these households there will most often be a room or a cabinet set up with an image of a god and lamps to light while offering prayers of thanks each morning. These areas are called pujas. It is generally accepted that the student will not need a puja during his/her stay in the U.S., but should s/he choose to continue his/her prayers, they can be done at any private moment during the day.

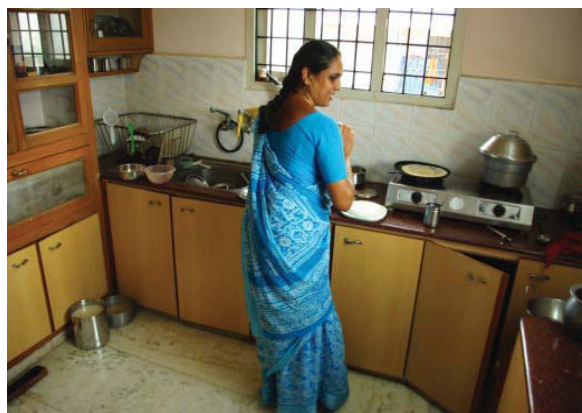
Muslim households may have a room, that is kept clean and free of pets, used specifically for prayer. Your student may bring a prayer rug to the U.S. and may require a clean/pet-free space for prayers. Christian households in India may or may not have any religious spaces in them.



**Ask your student what accommodations s/he may require for prayer or religious observances in the home. Help your student feel comfortable sharing about his or her beliefs and practices. For example, if your student did not bring a prayer rug, offer a small clean rug or towel to be used for prayers.**

#### ***The Kitchen***

An Indian kitchen may look very familiar to the American, except that most do not have a conventional oven or range-top as we are used to. Cooking is done on gas stove-top burners that look more like hotplates. Microwaves and toaster ovens are very rare. Kitchens are typically the domain of the women and/or servants.



#### **Supervise, supervise, supervise!**

**It can be great fun for your student and your family to have him/her help cook while being trained on the use of appliances etc. in the kitchen. Having your own kids help in the kitchen can be an additional source of encouragement for your student.**

Indian students may feel it is demeaning for them to say, "I don't understand." They may say they understand something, when they actually don't.



**Patiently work alongside your student and have him/her *show* you their understanding. Have your student try doing something that you've just demonstrated for him or her. Watch and repeat until it is done right.**

### ***Bedrooms***

Thin mattresses are the norm in India so this is what your student may prefer. Everyone may have their own rooms. However, during the hotter months, it is not uncommon to find everyone sleeping in the one room with air-conditioning, with some possibly sleeping on the floor.



*We had to discuss sleeping and bathing. She slept with her parents and brother in the same bed, so our solution was to move the dog into her room for company. She liked that\*.*

**U.S. Host Family**

***\*This solution may not be appropriate for a Muslim student (See Religion).***



**Ask your student if he/she is comfortable alone in his/her own room. Carefully observe your student's nonverbal cues as well (See Communication).**

**Offer suggestions to help alleviate any of your student's discomfort that you may have picked up on.**

### ***Family Time***

Needless to say, as important as family is to the Indian, family time is vital and cherished. Just like many American families, an Indian family will enjoy time together in front of their TV either watching a DVD movie or the favorite past-time, cricket. The family will also enjoy time together outside the home at the beach, or park, shopping together, eating out, going to temple, and attending family functions such as weddings.



**A traditional Hindu wedding**



*I'll never forget our student saying "when is family time?" I actually think, compared to most Americans, that we spend a lot of time together but she made us aware of how much more time she spent with her family. A lot more! Ask your student about things they did with their family.*

**U.S. Host Family**

### ***Meal Time***

Indians don't eat to live, they live to eat. Eating has to be one of India's greatest passions right above cricket. Most Indian food is outstanding for its rich flavors and hot spices. American food can seem very bland at first to your student. Vegetables and meats are always cooked and never served raw or undercooked. It may take time for your student to get used to eating food the way you are used to preparing it. Refer to the next section on Religion for further details about dietary practices for each of the common religions.



**A traditional meal served on a banana leaf**



**Allow your student to add spices to his or her meals, if desired.**

**Allow your student to have the vegetables cooked at first, and to have his or her meat cooked well-done.**

**Have your student help you prepare some of his/her traditional foods for some of your meals. Your student will enjoy sharing his/her culture and learning new skills in the kitchen.**



*[He] didn't like much of the food here in the U.S.*

**U.S. Host Family**

*Our food tasted bland to him and he didn't like most of it...We do not fix vegetables the way he was used to and didn't like most of them. We let him eat what he wanted.*

**U.S. Host Family**

**Dinner** is typically the major meal of the day. It will be served after the father has returned home from work, which can be later than 8 p.m. Dinners sometimes include meats, as well as cooked vegetables, rice, and breads such as chapati or naan.

**Lunch** for children in India may be leftovers, or more commonly, a chapati roll-up and/or some mixed rice preparations. An Indian breakfast is often convenient foods such as cereals, eggs, or some other food unique to a particular region of India.

**Snacks** at home are often made readily available for Indian children after school.



**Allow a few weeks for your student to adjust to an earlier dinner schedule. Snacks made available at later hours, such as at 9 p.m., will be appreciated by your student during that period.**

**Help your student with choosing healthy foods to snack on in your house, and the most appropriate hours for snacking as not to ruin his/her appetite for your regular meals.**



*He was used to eating later than our family, and going to bed earlier. He did not like raw vegetables or even crispy ones.*

**U.S. Host Family**

In India, it is very common for people to eat with their hands. However, it is always with the right hand, as the left hand is considered unclean. Indians do use cutlery on occasion, but your student may need additional instruction in terms of how s/he is expected to use cutlery in your household.



**Help your student with silverware usage at first. Try not to show any frustration towards his/her table manners, since eating with fingers is habitual for them, and it will take some time for them to adjust to using silverware.**

**Teach your student any other table manners that you expect from any of your other family members.**



*They eat with fingers as he commented that this was his first experience using utensils.*

**U.S. Host Family**

### ***Alcohol***

Many alcoholic beverages are readily available in India, but most teenagers are strictly forbidden by their families to drink. In some cases, if an Indian teen has been drinking, s/he may be too afraid to go home and will spend a night or two at a friend's house.



**Explain early the laws against teenage drinking to your student. Warn him/her of the peer pressures that can occur with American teens to drink or go to parties where alcohol is served.**

**Make it clear to your student that you will provide moral support and encourage him/her to ask for help if s/he is given any pressure to consume alcohol or other illegal drugs.**

**Be alert to any last minute calls from your student asking if s/he can spend the night at a friend's house. Speak to the friend's parents before considering giving permission.**

### ***Vegetarian vs. Non-Vegetarian***

While many Indians choose a vegetarian diet, others will eat different meats. However, even those who consider themselves as non-vegetarian will only eat meat perhaps once or twice a week.

Vegetables and rice remain the main staples for most Indians.



**Above Right: A meal served at a wedding reception**

**Left: An Indian chef using a tandoori oven.**



# RELIGION



*There is nothing noble in being superior to some other man. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self.*

**Hindu Proverb**

The Republic of India is a secular country meaning it does not have an official religion. Despite it being a secular country, religion is central to Indian culture, and its practice can be seen in virtually every aspect of Indian life. Religious practice varies from individual to individual depending on which view of life one has chosen and how strict one chooses to adhere to that view.

Hinduism is the most prevalent faith of India, practiced by about 80.5% of the population. Approximately 13% of the population practices Islam, and Sikhs and Christians combined make up 5% of the population (1.9 and 2.3% respectively). Other religious groups include Buddhists, Jains, Bahai, or of another faith (1.9%). Each religion brings its own rituals, dietary rules, and celebrations.



*...Diet is an issue; take the time to learn of the region and religion your guest is coming from.*

**U.S. Host Parent**

It is desirable to talk to your host student, prior to their arrival if possible, about his or her dietary preferences and what foods s/he is comfortable eating. Once your student has arrived, ask again about his or her dietary preferences.

Please refer to Appendix D "Cultural Tip Sheet for YES Students" and the YES Cultural Handbook where you will find helpful information and an in-depth look at various religions in India including dietary restrictions and holidays.

## Holidays & Celebrations

Festivals are grand and numerous throughout the year in India! Festivals and celebrations are not restrained to a single home or family. The whole community comes out and celebrates together. Some festivals are connected to religion; others do not have a religious connection, such as the following Indian National Holidays:

- ❖ New Year's Day (January 1)
- ❖ Republic Day (January 26)
- ❖ Independence Day (15 August)
- ❖ Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday (2 October)

There is a wide spectrum of how individuals or families celebrate the different holidays and festivals throughout India. Depending on which region the student comes from, s/he may be used to celebrating a different festival at home. Find out which region your student is from, which festivals and/or holidays are important to her/him. Ask your student to share how s/he celebrates back home, and what traditions are associated with the festival. The following subsections incorporate some of the festivals associated with the many religions of India.



**Help your student cope with feelings of homesickness by doing something together on days your student considers to be special such as holidays.**

Many festivals are very region-specific with Diwali being one of the only exceptions (see Diwali under Hinduism below). Your student may experience more intense feelings of homesickness depending on the festivals going on in his/her region back home. The following links provide dates of the Hindu festivals and the festivals of all the different religions in India respectively:

[http://www.godweb.org/hindu\\_calendar.htm](http://www.godweb.org/hindu_calendar.htm)

<http://festivals.iloveindia.com/festival-calendar.html>.

## **Hinduism**

Hindus believe in a multitude of gods and goddesses that are an integral aspect of Hindu mythology. Hinduism is a major world religion claiming approximately 800 million followers, and has had a profound influence on many other religions during its long history that dates back to 1500 B.C. Hinduism is not an organized religion like most Western religions, but rather a way of life. There is no totally exclusive set of beliefs that every Hindu must accept; instead there are questions that every Hindu asks of life, deity and self.

Most Hindu households have a prayer platform or room that is considered the most sacred place in the home. (See information on **the puja** in the **Family Life** section) They pray, fast, and worship their deity at least once a day, especially on holy days and days of festivities. As part of the religious activities, Hindus take regular morning baths, recite and chant certain mantras, light incense, prepare specific food items, offer flowers to the deities, and worship ancestors.

There are no fixed days or times to visit a Hindu temple. Certain days are dedicated to certain gods (for example Tuesdays are dedicated to Hanuman). People go to the temple to conduct a ceremonial worship or ritual (puja), or even to plead to the gods for good grades, a baby etc.



**Ask your student if s/he would like to set up an altar. You may find that it is not necessary but your offer to accommodate will be a welcoming gesture.**

## ***Dietary Practices***

Many Hindus are vegetarians, and almost all choose not to consume beef. Some individuals may also choose not to eat products with any animal by-products. Here again we caution that different regions, families and individuals may interpret and practice their faith in a wide range of ways. Your student may follow more or less strict dietary rules. She/he may be completely vegetarian or only refrain from eating beef.



**Check with your student to see if s/he is vegetarian and how strictly s/he adheres to vegetarianism both before and after s/he arrives.**



## ***Diwali***

Diwali, also known as Deepavali, is a major Hindu festival held within the month of Kartika (October-November). This is definitely the most popular Hindu festival that is celebrated universally, even among non-Hindus. Although officially a one-day “closed-holiday”, it is celebrated for a week with businesses closing and festivities enduring for that week. Known as the “Festival of Lights,” it is believed that it was on this day that Lord Rama entered Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile. Diwali is also celebrated as Naraka Chaturdashi, the day when the demon of darkness and dirt, Narakasura, was destroyed by Lord Krishna. The celebrations commence with a purifying oil bath and the lighting of lamps (diyas), symbolic of the spiritual light pervading the earth and the destruction of darkness and ignorance.

Diwali symbolizes the victory of good over evil, and lamps are lit as a sign of celebration and hope for mankind. Celebrations focus on lights and lamps, particularly the traditional oil lamp, or diya. Fireworks are associated with the festival in some regions of the country.

The timing of Diwali coincides with the beginning phase of the adjustment period for your student. S/he may experience an intense wave of homesickness.



**Diwali is the biggest gift-giving period in India, similar to Christmas in the United States.**

**Ask your student about the gift-giving traditions during this festival and consider getting him or her a small gift.**

**Take the initiative and encourage your student to celebrate Diwali to prevent feelings of homesickness.**

## ***Islam***

India has the world's third largest Muslim population after Indonesia and Pakistan. Please read the **YES Cultural Handbook** for an in-depth look at Islam from an historical perspective. The handbook includes descriptions of the Five Pillars of Islam, the Ten Key Tenants of Islam and differences and similarities between the Christian and Muslim faiths.

### ***Pets***

According to some Islamic interpretations, a dog’s mouth or saliva is considered dirty and contact with it requires cleansing. If licked by a dog, your student may feel it necessary to wash up with water and soap. However, your student might be perfectly fine living with dogs and enjoy playing with them.

### ***Modesty***

The Koran says that a woman should cover her hair, neck and chest areas. Many Muslim women may wear a head covering called “hijab”. Some girls will choose to keep their heads covered and wear modest attire. Wearing the hijab is a personal choice for most women.

### ***Islamic Prayer***

Devout Muslims pray five times a day and they may pray in public places, in their home, office or in a mosque. They pray facing in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, a city in present day Saudi Arabia.

The YES Cultural Handbook contains additional information on locating a local mosque, accurate prayer times, and a list of tips to assist your Muslim student in prayer.



**Help your host student find the correct direction to pray in the house.**

**While your student is praying s/he will not answer your questions, take a call or answer the door.**

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 at prayer time and establish that no family member can enter the room at this time.

### ***Dietary Practices***

The **YES Host Family Handbook** and **YES Cultural Handbook** contain a thorough explanation of the important Muslim dietary requirements. The following is a brief overview.

Muslims in general do not eat pork nor drink alcohol. If avoiding pork and alcohol is important to your student, it is best to have him/her read the labels carefully. Both the YES Host Family Handbook and the YES Cultural Handbook include a list of common American products that contain pork or pork by-products.

Some Muslims eat halal meat. If your host student is very observant and halal meat is not available in your area, kosher meat from a local supermarket or a vegetarian diet will do. Some students, on the other hand, will find it acceptable to eat non halal meat in areas where it is not available.



**Muslims will generally not eat meat that has also come in contact with pork. For example, they might not eat pizza with pepperoni taken off the top, a meal with ham taken out or cooked with wine.**

**Talk to your student about what foods s/he will or will not eat. If at all possible, find out if halal and/or kosher products are available in your city or surrounding areas before your student arrives.**

If your student has not conveyed any dietary restrictions prior to arrival, plan on serving vegetarian options the first few days until you and your student have a chance to discuss any dietary requirements.

### ***Muslim Holidays***

The most important Muslim holiday is Ramadan. Ramadan is the Islamic month of fasting. Muslims observe fasting from sunrise to sunset.



**During Ramadan Muslims generally 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.**

**Ramadan and Eid ul-Fitr (as well as the holiday Eid al-Adha, see below) is generally a month during which your student may experience intensified homesickness and may want to participate in prayer services at the mosque. If at all possible, attendance on these significant holy days should be arranged.**

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



*During the month of Ramadan, my host family bought me dates to break fast and they also gave me permission and helped me in making the dishes that we usually eat during Ramadan. They even shifted their dinner time according to the time I break fast in the evening. It was wonderful of them.*

**Indian Student hosted in U.S.**

There are two other main Muslim holidays: Eid ul-Fitr and Eid al-adha. Eid ul-Fitr signals the end of Ramadan. Eid al-Adha is celebrated 40 days later.

## **Christianity**

Christianity is the third largest religion of India and is more prevalent in the Southern part of the country. Its tenets and practices may be more familiar to an American family.



**Find out if your student was active in his or her church because s/he may miss being part of Christmas plays and celebrations that specific Christian denominations have. Ask your student if s/he would like to attend church services.**

### ***Christian Holidays***

Christmas (December 25)

Good Friday

Easter

## **Sikhism**

The Sikh religion emerged during the early 16th century in the state of Punjab in North India. The founder of this faith was Guru Nanak, who from his childhood was attracted to both Hindu and Muslim saints. Born a Hindu, but also inspired by the teachings of Islam, he began to preach the message of unity of both religions. According to him, the basic teachings of both faiths were essentially the same. Nanak attracted many followers and came to be known as a Guru or a teacher. His disciples came together to form a new monotheistic religious tradition called Sikhism. It emphasizes community service and helping the needy.

There are 20 million Sikhs in the world, most living in India. Sikh men choose not to cut their hair and wear a turban. Sikh men are easily identified by their beards and turbans, which are an outward sign of their religious identity. Young men are not accustomed to having others seeing them without a turban.



**Ensure that your Sikh student has a room in which he may tie his turban privately.**

In every Gurdwara (Sikh temple) there is a Langar (common kitchen) where Sikhs gather and contribute to preparing meals. Only vegetarian food is served in the Gurdwara but Sikhs are not bound to be exclusively vegetarian.

## **Jainism**

Jainism is practiced by approximately 3 million people. They believe that only by achieving complete purity of the soul can an individual be liberated. There are Five Great Vows: nonviolence and non-injury to animals, truthfulness, avoidance of greed, avoidance of sexual pleasure and, like the Buddhists, non-attachment to the world of illusion. Jains do not eat meat, gamble, or drink alcohol. Dietary restrictions

may extend to not eating root vegetables (garlic, potatoes, onions, etc.). Tilling of the earth harms insects or other living creatures which goes against their belief of non-injury to animals.



**Both before and after your student arrives, check to see if s/he is vegetarian to learn how strictly s/he adheres to vegetarianism and a diet that excludes root vegetables.**

## **Judaism**

Judaism makes up less than 1% of Indian population. If your family is of the Jewish faith, it will be important to share your traditions with your student for s/he may be unfamiliar with them.

# CONCEPT OF TIME



## ***Utaavale Aambaa Naa Paake***

*You cannot rush a mango tree to grow and yield ripe mangoes in a great hurry.*

**Meaning:** Everything precious has an intrinsic natural pace of mellow growth, and it should not be altered.

## **Pace of life**

Pace of life refers to the level of urgency and speed that we do something, such as making decisions, meeting deadlines and completing tasks.

India is on India Standard Time, or IST, and is often jokingly referred to as Indian *Stretchable* Time. The pace of life in India is slower; the level of urgency in completing tasks is more relaxed. When receiving an invitation to dinner or someone's home, arriving 15 to 30 minutes later is ok and usually appreciated by the host. An Indian person may tell you "I will call you in half an hour", or "I will have the report ready by 5:00 p.m. today", be mindful that you might get the call after an hour or two, or that you may receive the report next day. It is important to realize and accept the fact that they are not lying to you, nor that they are incompetent. It is just that their pace is different. Accepting that this is the pace of life in India reduces frustrations, but requires some patience.

Time is more fluid, and there is no great need to plan or schedule things in the future. Activities and socializing are more spontaneous. The Indian work week is Monday through Saturday. Parents might have to work on weekends. When there is free time on the weekends, plans are made spontaneously. And the reverse is also true. Plans can fall through just as quickly as they are made. Though time is fluid in the Indian context, time is always made to spend with family and to attend family functions. Family time is very important (see Family Life). Find time to talk to your student in a relaxed manner.

Unlike India, the pace of life in America is faster and punctuality is valued highly.



**Teach your student that punctuality shows respect for someone else's time. Remind your student of scheduled appointments that he/she is expected to attend.**

**Stress the importance of being on time. And remind him/her that if your student can't make the appointment, to be respectful and notify the other party as soon as possible.**



*Maybe get your student a calendar and write the exchange organization's dates in there, to start with. Then write in important school and family functions. We just talked about it and she would forget.*

**U.S. Host Family**

Indian students have a heavy workload with their studies (see Education) and as such they have less free time than their American counterparts. They do, however, make time to visit with their friends. As host parents you might see that your student is not handling the free time s/he has well. Giving your student small chores or asking her/him to help you complete a task, even though you can do it yourself, will make your student feel useful and part of the family.



*...our student was not always sure how to handle so much free time.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**Help your student get to school on time by discussing bedtime, wake up time, and morning routines from the onset. Creating a new routine and sticking to it might prove easier in the long run.**

**Help your student manage his/her free time by encouraging him/her to explore new hobbies such as music, art, drama or sports.**

## CONCEPT OF SPACE



The concept of space is subjective and variable, meaning it depends on who you ask, where they are from, and/or the situation. Individuals from a densely populated country feel comfortable in relatively less space. Conversely, individuals from a sparsely populated country tend to prefer a larger radius of space to feel comfortable. India is a densely populated country. They tend to maintain closer spatial relations when in line or getting through crowds.

**Stop and think for a moment about how much space you need to feel comfortable while standing in line or when you are having a conversation with a good friend.**

### Personal Space

Did you determine the amount of your preferred personal space? Your personal space is likely to be greater and more important to you than to an Indian for two reasons. First, personal space is an important concept in American society. In India, however, there is no concept of personal space. Second, the amount of space allowed for between individuals illustrates how personal relationships are conducted in Indian society and has nothing to do with personal space. If two strangers are talking, there will be more space between them, and especially so if they are of the opposite sex. If the two individuals are close friends, they tend to stand closer. This is true even if they are of the opposite sex.

Once your Indian student starts school, s/he might be confused upon seeing boys and girls hug and kiss when they greet. An Indian student might misinterpret this and think that a friend is romantically interested in him/her.





**Talk to your student about how American students hug when greeting, that this is typical in America, and no romantic feelings are involved. (See Personal Relationships)**

## **Private vs. Public Space**

Privacy, as we know it in the West, is equated with loneliness in India. Where, in America, private space is very important, there is no “privacy” in Indian life. In fact, there is no word for it in any of the Indian languages. Children are seldom alone in the home and bedrooms are shared (see Family Life). Neighbors come by unannounced because social interaction and hospitality are very important aspects of Indian culture.

Indian students are not used to the concept of private space. Your student might feel overwhelmed having his/her own room in the beginning and may soon come enjoy the privacy and space. S/he might feel uncomfortable when other bedroom doors are closed. Closed bedroom doors may be perceived as unwelcoming.



**Explain to your student that closed bedroom doors do not mean that s/he is not welcome. S/he can knock on the door and wait to be asked to come in.**

**Remember that your Indian student's sense of family and being cared for is associated with being surrounded by family and not being left alone!**

Your student is used to having family members around checking on him/her and enquiring about his/her needs. S/he may expect the same from you, the host family. S/he may not realize that s/he is invading the private space of the family by wanting to hang around with family members all the time. Remember that, especially in the beginning, it will be important that family members seek interaction with your host student. Interaction may alleviate feelings of loneliness.

## PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Forging and maintaining lifelong relationships is of utmost importance in Indian society. As discussed earlier, Indians have a community-based society, in which the family is the central unit. Like American teens, Indian students will have many different types of relationships; however what kinds of interactions are considered appropriate in each one can be very different! A few of the most important relationships in your student's life may be:

**Family:** The family is the central unit in Indian life, and each family member has a specific role to play. The student may be used to very close involvement with extended family as well (see Family Life).

**Teachers:** Teachers and tutors are given the highest respect in India, and Indian students may be surprised by the informality with which American students address teachers (see School and Education).

**Family Friends:** The friends of the student's parents, and their children, are considered "family friends." There is not a distinction drawn between the parents' friend circle and the child's. The child is expected to socialize when the parents' friends are visiting, and the parents do not hesitate to interact with their children's friends, particularly if they observe the child do or say something considered inappropriate. Your student may seek your help and advice when it comes to making and maintaining friendships.

**Friendships:** As in the US, teenagers have close friendships with others their age in their school and their community. Unlike in the U.S., it is rare for teenagers to have friends of the opposite gender. Usually friendships are formed over many years of interaction, and the student's friends are essentially part of the family (or literally part of the family as Indian teens are usually very close to cousins or siblings of a similar age). Coming from such a tight-knit community, it may not be immediately obvious to the student how to go about making new friends.

### Maintaining Relationships Back Home

Given the close nature of relationships in India, it may be particularly difficult for your student to be separated from his/her family and friends. Your student may want to be in constant contact with those back home, especially in the beginning which can be expensive and isolating.

Your Indian student may not have had regular or any access to the internet or a cell phone back home and so these technologies may be somewhat of a novelty for your student. Talk to your student right away about the appropriate amount of phone and internet use and agree on a time limit. Be understanding- your Indian student may be used to having his/her parents' input on every decision, and adjustment could be difficult. Encourage your student to focus energy on establishing new relationships rather than worrying about home, or being glued to the phone or computer. Make sure your student knows s/he can come to you, a host sibling, and/or the local program contact with feelings of home sickness.

Wishing friends and family happy birthday is very important in India. Remembering that it is a special day for that person is a sign of caring. Keep this in mind while negotiating when and how often your student calls and emails home.



Ask your student to let you know beforehand when the birthdays of close family and friends are coming up, so that the student can plan to call, email or send a card. Use programs such as Skype or a calling card as those options are cheaper than the typical, long-distance calling plan.

If your student seems confused or uncomfortable around computers, offer to demonstrate the programs which they might need for school such as word processing. Don't wait for them to ask for help- they may not be comfortable admitting to you that they do not know how to use something which seems commonplace in your home.

When your student does call home, if they are using a landline, help them figure out correct dialing procedure (websites such as <http://www.howtocallabroad.com/india/> can be helpful resources). It is very important that they first dial the US exit code (011), and India's country code is 91, and many area codes begin in 1- thus the Indian student may accidentally reach emergency services if s/he is not careful! **Please advise your student that if they ever do accidentally reach emergency services, not to hang up without explaining the mistake, as a 911 hang up will be attended to by the police.**

## Making Friends



*My student realized, about halfway through her stay, that she was spending too much time studying and not enough time making friendships. So, she started working on that and we did our best to host her friends and take her to events.*

**U.S. Host Family**

Your student may be unaccustomed to the independent and spontaneous nature of American friendships. For an Indian student to go out with his or her friends, s/he must have the parental permission well in advance, and it is more common for friends to visit one another's houses. Your student will also probably be used to devoting his or her time to studying, so make sure to emphasize the importance of making American friends to your student, and help by providing him or her with opportunities to do so. It may make your student more comfortable if you offer them the opportunity to invite new friends to your home. Extracurricular activities are not emphasized in Indian schools, and are a great opportunity for your student to interact with peers and try something new. Attending exchange related functions is another great way for your student to meet new people.



**Help your student to make friends by:**

- ❖ Explaining that American teenagers may use humor and slang that is unfamiliar to your student. Be especially conscious of helping your student identify unfamiliar and potentially offensive phrases, and helping place slang terms in the right context.
- ❖ Participating in local church activities and volunteer activities in the local community.
- ❖ Encouraging your student to join a school club or organization.
- ❖ Offering your student opportunities to invite friends to your home perhaps giving them a chance to share their culture, such as an Indian meal or Bollywood movie night.

## Gender and Relationships



*Dating was the trickiest issue for our student. Kids here date and he had promised his parents he would have nothing to do with girls while he was here. He did go to school dances, but destroyed all photos before he went home. It was a moral dilemma that he thought a lot about. We allowed him to make his own decisions regarding girls, but held him to the same curfew times that our children had.*

**U.S. Host Family**

*Avoid pressure to "get a date" during the early part of the year. The student will probably be uncomfortable and have no idea how to go about this. Work on how to socialize appropriately with teens of the opposite sex during the year, and by Spring Prom, having a date will be more fun for the student.*

**U.S. Host Family**

In India, relationships (platonic or romantic) between members of the opposite sex are uncommon and sometimes seen as wrong or inappropriate. Though most schools in India are co-ed, boys and girls usually relate to each other only as classmates. The concept of "dating" is very new to India, since in many families marriages are still arranged by the child's parents, although "love marriages" are increasingly more common.

When students in India date, the relationship is much more similar to close friendships between members of opposite gender in America and there is almost no physical component to the relationship. Boyfriends and girlfriends in India will usually only spend time together in a group setting. The relationship is usually not disclosed to parents, and there are certainly no demonstrations of affection while at school. Your student might be made uncomfortable by close interactions with the opposite gender, or be confused as to what is considered appropriate conduct. Be sensitive to these issues—especially when it comes to school dances, or other "date" related American traditions, give your student the opportunity to become comfortable with the concept.



*Our student's social immaturity in not knowing how to treat girls hampered his peer relationships somewhat. Dating was a big dilemma for our student. He learned a lot about American girls while he was here.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**If your student shows an interest in dating, be sure to be clear about what is considered acceptable in your household.**

## Accepting Differences

Though India is a very diverse country, it is also a hierarchically structured one, and interactions vary based on age, class, profession, and gender. Because equality is so highly valued in the U.S., this worldview can come across as rude or insensitive. Help your student understand which words and ideas might offend people, and that the same courtesy and respect should be paid to everyone.

## **Sex and Intimacy**

Sex and intimacy are taboo subjects in India, and your student might be shocked or confused by seeing public displays of affection, or by sex being openly discussed in school (in health class or by peers). For many Indian students, their perception of U.S. American teens and young adults may be based mostly on what they've seen of the western media (music, T.V. shows such as "Friends", U.S. American celebrities), which can present a hyper-sexualized version of U.S. American society. Help your student gain a realistic understanding of appropriate behavior with the opposite sex, and what constitutes sexual harassment. It is essential that you give a firm definition of appropriate limits of acceptable behavior to your student, and explain what is permitted in your household, regardless of what they may observe at school or in the media.

## **LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender)**

Are there homosexuals in India? The classic response is, "We don't have any!" This statement reveals that homosexuality in India is considered a taboo subject. Your student will probably have little to no exposure to homosexuality and may be very surprised to see homosexuality discussed openly in the media, their community, or their school. Your student may be confused, or even conflicted as to how to approach interactions or discussions regarding LGBT issues. Help your student understand that sexual orientation is a highly personal matter and that regardless of sexual orientation everyone should be treated with the same courtesy and respect. Talk with your student about certain words and phrases that are absolutely not acceptable. For example, your student should be advised to never use the word "gay" in a derogatory manner, be it calling someone "gay" or saying something is "gay".



**Your student may need to be informed of the fact that some schools have Lesbian & Gay (LG) or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) school clubs.**

**Please be open to helping your student gain more understanding about alternative lifestyles in the U.S.**

## SCHOOL & EDUCATION



Swans are often associated with [Saraswati](#), Hindu goddess of learning, music and art.

The following section highlights the key differences between the U.S. and Indian education systems that will impact your student's experience. There are many kinds of schools and Boards (certification agencies) in India. All schools require the student's family to pay something; some schools are very inexpensive and others are quite expensive. Most YES students come from private schools (not government run) but they are not necessarily from wealthy schools or from schools with wealthy students.

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, culminating projects, oral presentations, etc.

By contrast, in Indian secondary schools, teaching most often takes the form of lecturing and learning is primarily achieved through repetition and memorization. It is often considered inappropriate for a student to argue or give an opposing point of view since the teacher is highly respected and questioning one's elders is a mark of disrespect.



*Our student enjoyed having an open relationship with his America teachers.*

**U.S. Host Family**

In India, academic success is measured largely through testing. For this reason, and because the quality of teaching varies greatly among secondary schools in India, most families rely on private tutors to ensure that their children have the knowledge and information needed to pass grade level and university entrance exams.



*It's quite different. The projects, their formats and everything. But [in the U.S.] you can ask the teachers here as many times as you want, they don't mind it!*

**Indian student hosted in U.S.**



**Indian students are not usually encouraged to scrutinize or think critically and many Indian students find it a challenge to do so in their U.S. high school. Please spend time to help your student by asking questions and giving feedback on his/her work.**



## Teacher/Student Relationships

Teachers are highly respected in India. Respect is demonstrated by addressing teachers and principals as "Ma'am" or "Sir" without using their last name. Also, students wait to go to their teachers at the end of the school day to consult with their teachers for more help.



*She showed respect to her elders and teachers. She explained to people that in India, teachers are highly respected.*

**U.S. Host Family**

U.S. teachers who are unfamiliar with exchange students can misinterpret behaviors and ways of approaching homework and classroom interactions. For example, they could interpret the student as shy or disinterested when he or she may not be comfortable speaking with the teacher or raising his or her hand to contribute in class. If your student is expected to work with a group of students in the classroom, he or she may not know what is expected of him or her in that role. Your student may also be reticent to speak up because his Indian English is somewhat different from U.S. American English.



*He wasn't used to the level of informality between teachers and students that he saw at American high schools. He was probably a little more formal and polite than American students usually are. Perhaps not surprisingly, a number of his teachers really liked him.*

**U.S. Host Family**



### **Help Your Student Adjust:**

- ❖ **Prepare your student for the informal way American students address teachers.**
- ❖ **Tell teachers and counselors early in the year**
  - **Tell them about the respectful form of address used in India**
  - **Request frequent communication if your student has difficulty or does not turn in assignments on time**

## English Language Proficiency

Most Indian students will have studied English for a number of years and have a good level of proficiency in English. In fact, English is the first language in all but the government schools. However, your student may speak very rapidly or have an accent that is difficult to understand and may not understand the U.S. American accent and usage of slang.



*I had no difficulty regarding assignments but I only had the problem of people not understanding my accent, which I think is now sort of improved.*

**Indian student hosted in U.S.**

*He didn't know the English word for something but we were able to use other words to come to an understanding.*

**U.S. Host Family**

Successful functioning at school depends on your student's ability to speak clearly and be understood. Speed and accent will be most noticeable at first. However, your student may also need guidance in knowing how to make requests and showing appreciation when help is given. (See Communication.)



#### **Help Your Student Adjust:**

- ❖ **Tell your student if s/he is speaking too rapidly to be understood. Ask your student to speak more slowly.**
- ❖ **You may also need to speak more slowly until your student is accustomed to U.S. American speech patterns.**
- ❖ **Make sure your student understands what you have said by asking him or her to repeat what he understands.**
- ❖ **Correct the pronunciation of words new to your student. Perhaps begin by asking if you may help him or her with English by demonstrating the correct pronunciation of words.**
- ❖ **Teach several new English words each day if your student is having difficulty with English.**
- ❖ **Play games such as Scrabble that will help your student use the language in a fun way.**

English or Language Arts courses will be especially difficult for your Indian student because of the requirement to read entire novels and plays rather than short stories (which is what s/he will be accustomed to reading in English.) If your student encounters severe difficulty with English at school or at home, consult your local contact and do it right away!

### **Daily and Weekly Schedule**

Indian class subjects are chosen by the school, not the student. By 11th grade, students select a "stream" of study for their focus: science, commerce or humanities. American schools offer a much wider variety of courses including many electives. Some course offerings such as Health or Biology are likely to include units on Sex Education. Indian students will not be accustomed to this topic being addressed in school.



**Review course offerings with your student to help make choices for the courses to take.**

**Be alert to courses with embarrassing content such as units on sex education.**

**Encourage your student to explore elective courses not offered in India such as music, drama and art.**

In India, students remain in the same classroom all day and teachers move from room to room. Strong, long term relationships develop among students because of the amount of time they spend together in school. Your student may have difficulty adjusting to many different classes with a new set of classmates in each class. S/he may also not understand the use of school lockers and the short "passing period" between classes.



**Teachers may introduce exchange students, but if they do not your student will have to assume responsibility for telling classmates s/he is an exchange student. Explain the importance of introducing himself or herself to classmates and telling the classmates he or she is an exchange student.**



**Tell your student the importance of keeping his/her locker private and not accepting items from other students to store in the locker assigned to him/her. Indian students may have difficulty saying "No" to such requests because they are accustomed to being helpful to others.**



Students attend school in India from Monday through Saturday. The school day may begin as early as 7:00 a.m. or 8:00 a.m. and ends anywhere from 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. School may be cancelled spontaneously and without clear explanation. "Make-up days" may also be announced without much notice.

Students in India get to school in a variety of ways. They may walk, ride school buses, bikes or take public transportation. Some may be accustomed to having their parent take them to and from school each day. This is one way parents demonstrate care for their children in India.



*Getting him to school on time was a challenge. He didn't care if he was late. He always wanted a ride even though he could easily walk. That problem only related to school. He liked sleeping late.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**Explain your school's transportation system.**

**Introduce your student to other teens with whom you consider it safe to ride to and from school.**

## **Lunch at School**

Most U.S. American students eat lunch at school unless the school has an open campus where students are allowed to leave for lunch. Indian students may not be familiar with the concept of a "sack lunch" or how to pack a lunch from home. They may also not be comfortable with all the food selections offered in the school cafeteria.

Host families are required by the U.S. State Department to provide "three square meals" a day for their exchange students. Tell your student if you will be paying for the school lunch (through the lunch account system at school) or providing a lunch from home. Teach him/her about choices to make when packing a lunch at home and teach him/her how to prepare lunch the night before. Students' YES stipends are not intended to cover school lunches. (For appropriate use of the YES stipends, see the YES Host Family Handbook.)



**Early in the year, have fun packing a school lunch together and then let the student make his/her own lunch for school.**

## Homework and Grades

In India, homework is given daily and viewed as a way to help the student learn, but it does not count for grades and may not be turned in to the teacher. It is common practice for Indian students to help one another with homework so the importance of completing homework on an individual basis and on time may be difficult for your student to grasp. In addition, your student may not be aware of the seriousness of plagiarism in the U.S. so if s/he has an essay or research paper, check to be sure he understands the rules about plagiarism.



**Monitor homework and provide help with school work – at least in the beginning. Your student may say s/he has done the homework and all is going well at school, when in fact, it is not. (See Communication.)**

**Reinforce that many factors contribute to a grade as Indian students may think only the test or exam counts.**

Indian students will expect a final examination and perhaps a few major tests in each course, but may not realize daily homework, quizzes, class participation, etc. are all a part of their grade. Eighty per cent of the final grade in most Indian schools is the final exam and 20% is awarded for the remaining work. In India, it is common practice for teachers to announce marks (grades) publically. Having grades considered a more private and confidential piece of information will be different for your student.



*School and homework were much more structured in India than here. Our student was used to going directly from school to a supervised environment for the afternoon and evening, where a "teacher" helped them with studying and homework. It was hard for our student to adjust to doing homework independently. I wish we would have realized this earlier, we might have done things differently and his performance in school might have gone better.*

**U.S. Host Family**

## Parental Involvement

In India, success in school is considered the most important thing in a child's life. Indian mothers especially are expected to monitor and ensure their child's success by constantly being available to nurture, encourage and help the child. Most children typically consult with their parents about every aspect of school life and do not make school related decisions without the advice of their parents. In India, if a student has even the slightest difficulty at school the parent (usually the mother) goes to the school to intervene on behalf of her child. This is true for talking with the teacher about homework and tests as well as all school related issues.



*Always ask what is going on and confirm what school or other events the student will attend. Our student didn't talk to us about school events ahead of time.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**Coach your student in how to approach teachers when s/he needs help at school. Explain to your student that most American parents do not intervene on behalf of their child, but expect the child to talk to the teacher when s/he needs help.**

## Sports and Extracurricular Activities

In the U.S., sports and extracurricular activities are considered an essential part of a successful student's high school experience. In India, there is no universal expectation that schools will provide activities such as sports, clubs and social activities.

If sports are offered in an Indian school, far less emphasis is placed on them than in the U.S. school. If your student is interested in sports, encourage him/her to join one of the school's teams. However, ensure that your student is aware of the time commitment involved with practice and games. Some students may not understand the expectation of daily practice.

An Indian student's concept of school spirit will be different from a U.S. American's. They will not be familiar with the social traditions in U.S. American schools. Explain how school spirit is displayed at U.S. American high schools through pep rallies, cheer leaders, grade level competition, school colors, etc. Early in the year, explain Homecoming, Prom and other school traditions. Help your student plan ahead for the expense of these special occasions.

Some Indian schools have clubs, but not all. Your student will not be aware of the wide selection of after school clubs available to all students.



*Encourage the student to join clubs! (Choir and drama are really great, if they aren't athletes.) Participate in leadership opportunities like Key Club, Outdoor School, Red Cross Volunteering, Church Youth Group or Young Life--any opportunity where caring people can connect in the small group environment.*

**U.S. Host Family**



**Network with friends to borrow semi-formal/formal attire for your student for Homecoming and Prom.**

**Find out which extracurricular opportunities offered at your school match your Indian student's interest.**

**Help your student arrange for rides with fellow students and explain your school transportation system for after school events**

## Clothing at School

In India, all students wear uniforms to school so your student may not initially be comfortable in choosing what clothing to wear to school.



**Ask your student to pick out clothes the night before since s/he will not be used to making a decision about what to wear to school.**

Most schools have dress codes articulating what is and is not acceptable attire at school. It is much more embarrassing for your student to be spoken to by the school principal about inappropriate dress than by you. For example, a t-shirt with the picture of a marijuana leaf might not attract negative attention in India, but would be considered unacceptable in a U.S. school.





Physical Education classes in American schools usually have specific kind of clothes that must be worn. In some schools it is a uniform, in others, any t-shirt and shorts are acceptable. For Indian girls, wearing shorts at school may be very uncomfortable.

Indian students are not accustomed to showering or dressing and undressing in front of others. If your student signs up for a gym class, please discuss the school's dress-out procedures with him/her and alert the gym teacher to your student's sensitivity.

Top: Class picture: students in school uniform

Right: Students in school uniform on their way to school.



**Help your female Indian student find something to wear for gym class that is both appropriate from the school's perspective and comfortable for your student.**

**If your student is Sikh, please work with the school gym teacher to have the student excused from showering after gym class. Consult with your local contact if there are questions.**

## Muslim Students at School

Questions and concerns about Muslim students at school will be addressed by your local contact and many questions are answered in the ***YES Cultural Handbook***. Speak with the guidance counselor, especially if there are few or no Muslim students attending your school. The guidance counselor can help with questions about where and when to pray at school, fasting during Ramadan, etc.



**A Muslim girl wearing a head scarf should NOT be limited in the school activities in which she can participate.**

**Unless PE class is required for the entire year, consider delaying it until second semester so it does not conflict with Ramadan when students will be fasting.**

## Success in U.S. School

School in the U.S. is quite different from school in India. New styles of teaching and learning, moving from room to room, not knowing classmates and having a new set of classmates every hour, and a wealth of sports and activities are among the most startling differences. Your student will be accustomed to having ongoing conversations with his or her parents about every aspect of his/her



school life. This openness to talking with you about school can be both surprising and satisfying to an American parent. Your student will want to know you are interested in what happens at school, but may not be comfortable initiating that conversation.



**3 Keys to Success:**

- ❖ **Ask your student about his/her day at school**
- ❖ **Get your student involved in activities at school**
- ❖ **Work immediately on helping to improve English skills, if needed**



*Tell the student ahead of time that Americans tend to interact very informally and provide some examples of what is considered appropriate and inappropriate around teachers, parents, and among friends. Turn this into a conversation where the student also tells the family what it's like in his country, and help both student and host family acknowledge that there are pros and cons to both ways of doing things.*

**U.S. Host Family**

*These kids are great. There is much to be learned from them. Enjoy them and the experiences they will bring into your life.*

**U.S. Host Family**

## APPENDIX A – REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

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### Image Source

Map of India. 2010. <http://www.mapsofindia.com>

## **APPENDIX B – YES PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program was established in October, 2002 after a general recognition that public diplomacy efforts had been neglected in many countries around the world for many years. The effects of this neglect came into stark focus in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001. The Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau of the U.S. Department of State (ECA), along with the U.S. exchange community, recognized the importance of youth exchange as a key component of renewed commitment to building bridges between citizens of the U.S. and countries around the world, particularly those with significant Muslim populations.

The ECA joined forces with like-minded, U.S. high school exchange organizations including AFS-USA, the Program of Academic Exchange (PAX), American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) Foundation's Academic Year Abroad (AYA), ACES (American Cultural Exchange Service) and CIEE; as well as Mobility International. Sponsored by ECA this group worked together with Partner organizations in several countries, including Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, and Turkey to provide scholarships for high school students (15-17 years) from countries with significant Muslim populations to spend up to one academic year in the U.S.

### **YES Selection Process**

Students who participate in the YES Program are selected in an open, merit-based competition and reflect a wide range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds within their own countries. Indian YES participants undergo a very rigorous selection process and come from all over India. Students who are accepted are provided a full scholarship to study in the U.S. The YES Program also welcomes students with disabilities and works with US organization Mobility International to help support students on-program.

### **AFS Selection Process**

A small percentage of the Indian participants hosted by AFS-USA have not received YES funding. These participants also undergo a rigorous selection process as there is less socio-economic diversity within this group. Non-YES Indian participants tend to come from urban, middle to upper-middle class families.

## APPENDIX C – DECODING INDIAN ENGLISH

### Potentially Worrisome Words

**Mad:**

USA- Angry

India- Crazy

**Abuse:**

USA- Hit/strike, harm

India- To use foul language

**Pass Out:**

USA- To faint

India- To graduate from school

**Ragging:**

USA- Not used

India- Hazing

**Eve Teasing:**

USA- Not used

India- Sexual harassment of females

**Discipline:**

USA- A stern talking to, grounding, or other actions to impose consequences on a teen or child

India- Corporal punishment

**Mugging:**

USA- Street Robbery

India- Memorizing

### Worrisome Symbol

In India the swastika is associated with Hinduism, and represents the continuous motion of time and space. It is a popular decoration in homes, and on bags, clothing, and jewelry. It is in no way associated with Nazi-ism, and is not rotated (as it is when used as a symbol for Nazi Propaganda). Do not be alarmed if your student brings a decorative item or accessory with a swastika on it, and advise them as to when and where it might be appropriate to place/wear the item, so as to avoid confusion.

### Potentially Confusing Words

**School:**

USA- Elementary/ High/ College- any educational institution

India- The term school ONLY applies to grades K-12

**Even:**

Indian- well/also/too, 'Even I know how to do it'

**Cousin brother/sister:**

India- A close cousin, sometimes just referred to as another brother or sister

**Tiffin:**

A lunch box

**“In to” ex. 3 into 3:**

Multiplied by, the same way U.S. Americans use “times” ex. 3 times 3

**Intimate:**

To inform

**Potentially Delicious Words****Bhindi or Ladyfingers:**

Okra

**Capsicum:**

Bell pepper

**Aubergine:**

Eggplant

**Kurd:**

Yogurt

**Mutton**

Lamb

## APPENDIX D – 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 <u>YES Cultural Handbook</u> 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.</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</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</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</p> |



| TOPIC | CULTURAL INFORMATION  | POSSIBLE SUPPORT ISSUES   | SUPPORT ADVICE  |
|-------|---|---|---|
|       | <p>are religiously-dictated.</p> <p>Many religions require specific levels of modesty in dress or specific types of dress. In the case of Islam, there is a wide array of interpretation of “modest dress” but many observant Muslims feel that head covering for women is essential and many would include the covering of legs and arms for both men and women as essential elements of modesty in dress. Again, there is a widely varying interpretation among the religiously observant Muslims about what is required.</p> <p>In Islam, the saliva of dogs is to be avoided, as it is seen as unclean.</p> | <p>prayer, which takes place during the school day.</p> <p>Ablutions: practice of religious cleansing (basically, of the face, hands and feet) before prayer can result in wet floors/</p> <p>Some people not used to seeing women who cover their hair, will find the practice awkward. The head cover will not stop a student from participating in normal family and school life (with the exception maybe of joining a coed swimming team in some cases). Some students who wear the head covering might feel somewhat rejected by their peers in their schools because the head covering is unusual to see in most U.S. high schools.</p> <p>Students may be afraid or reluctant to live with dogs Many religiously observant students would strongly prefer not to touch dogs. Some may not realize</p> | <p>schools allow the students to use a corner of a room designated for “study hall” or a school counsellor’s office.</p> <p>Since wet floors in a bathroom may be seen as quite OK in the context many students are coming from, explanation of expectations regarding dry floors and using towels to soak up any water left on the floor would help them meet expectations in the host family’s home. Stepping inside the bathtub, rather than using the sink for the ablutions can help a lot.</p> <p>Students who use head covering make the decision to wear a veil on their own and will not view it as subservient (as is often interpreted in the West). They see the head covering as an essential element of their religious observance and are not embarrassed by. A frank and open conversation about their religion and the part the head covering plays in their observance can help to demystify it and even lead to some good discussions about what “modest” dress may mean to different communities.</p> <p>Keep the dog out of the student’s room and don’t expect the student to pet the dog; this does not mean the student cannot live with a dog; many students come to like their host</p> |

| TOPIC                               | CULTURAL INFORMATION  | POSSIBLE SUPPORT ISSUES  | SUPPORT ADVICE   |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|
|                                     |   | <p>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>family's dog and overcome that fear. 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>  |
| <b>SOCIAL LIFE AND GENDER ROLES</b> | <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> |

| TOPIC                | CULTURAL INFORMATION  | POSSIBLE SUPPORT ISSUES  | SUPPORT ADVICE   |
|----------------------|---|--|--|
| 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 expectation that it will need to be offered several times before they can accept. Likewise, when told “no”, they may argue/ ask repeatedly after being told “no”, since this is what they think will bring the expected result. Repetition is very acceptable.</p> | <p>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 example); for them it is important to be modest and respectful; this could be shown by not looking people directly in the eye and by speaking in a very low and soft voice.</p> | <p>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 up (for example, “this ....must have been very difficult for you”, showing the student that you feel for them, understand them, and want to help them.</p> <p>When the need for confrontation arises, know that this makes them very uncomfortable and the use of a third party (maybe a teacher or religious person) may be helpful. It helps to use stories or accounts of personal or other people’s experiences to get a point across (could be fictitious, too) without mentioning people by name to avoid embarrassment.</p> |

| TOPIC                           | CULTURAL INFORMATION  | POSSIBLE SUPPORT ISSUES   | SUPPORT ADVICE  |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|
| HOUSEHOLD RULES AND FAMILY LIFE | <p>Many students could be used to male dominance in their families. It could be that they did not have a lot of independence (may be more the case for females than males) and had a lot of very direct guidance from their parents. They may not be used to the concept of getting an allowance and may have no practice in spending money, either not wanting to spend any or spending too much. Household chores may not be something they are used to, especially males. Objects or personal things may be considered as belonging not to one individual, but to everyone in the family because it is one unit.</p> | <p>Families may find the students passive or needing too much guidance, direction, and/or attention. They may be perceived as lazy if they have to be constantly reminded to pick up after themselves or keep things clean. They could also be seen as immature. Some males may not be following instructions from females or feel uncomfortable in a female dominated household. Some communication practices may be perceived as “badgering”, not listening, or not following instructions. Using other people’s property could be an issue (stealing vs. sharing). Students could be expecting to be treated as guests at the beginning.</p> | <p>It may be advisable to enlist the help of a same sex person in advising the students. Doing things as a family and spending time together would be a good idea as well as giving a lot of direction and guidance at the beginning and slowly making changes. Taking the student to other families where behaviour patterns can be observed is also helpful. Of course, another good way to experience different family styles is by spending time with friends and their families.</p> |
| TIME AND SPACE                  | <p>Time is not as scheduled and more fluid in most of the YES countries. It is not as important to be on time. It may also not be common to plan things that will happen in the future.</p> <p>Personal space may not be as important and people could stand a lot closer during conversations.</p>   | <p>Some students could be late or oversleep. They may want to stay up late. They may not be on time at school or for certain events the family is planning on. They may change their minds on whether or not they would like to do something or not openly state what they would like to do.</p> <p>Being physically close may make some people uncomfortable.</p>  | <p>Students may need some time to adjust to a very time-oriented U.S. culture where it is important to schedule events ahead of time and to be on time. They may need some additional help in getting up or getting ready for events.</p> <p>You will need to offer an explanation on space differences and how people feel about it in different countries.</p>  |

| TOPIC  | CULTURAL INFORMATION   | POSSIBLE SUPPORT ISSUES   | SUPPORT ADVICE   |
|--------|--|---|--|
| SCHOOL | <p>School and studying may vary also. In some countries, there is a lot of homework and students are expected to work on their own when at home. In some other countries, studying may be done at school and not at home. There may be more group activities or very little discussion. Testing is different (multiple choice and open book tests may be uncommon). Writing styles, learning styles, teacher/student interaction are most likely completely different.</p> | <p>Students may have a difficult time adjusting to school and different expectations from teachers and host families. Students who do little homework or little independent work after school in their own countries may be struggling in school. Due to the idea of saving face and indirect communication styles, they may state they have done their homework and school is going well when in fact it is not. Teachers who have not had experiences with people from other cultures could be misinterpreting behaviours and ways of approaching homework and classroom interaction. In Asian cultures it is not expected to criticize or disagree with what the teacher is saying; they may be very quiet in class. In other countries, the classroom may be very loud and students work a lot in groups.</p> | <p>It is definitely a good idea to contact the school and the teachers early and get progress reports. It may be a good idea to monitor homework and to provide help (or enlist help), especially in the beginning. Get grade reports early and do not assume that the student's reports on school work are accurate. Get the teachers email addresses 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> |