



SEPTEMBER SUPPORT TIPS

Happy Fall! For those of you who have just started your journey as a Local Coordinator (LC), YFU welcomes you to the Support Tips Series. As international students arrive and settle into their American families and lives, YFU would like to help you make this time of transition valuable for everyone you support.

We hope these timely tips will provide you with the materials necessary to have comfortable and meaningful conversations during your monthly meetings. As always, thank you for the work you do, YFU could not exist without the dedicated support you provide!

SUPPORT TIPS

POST-ARRIVAL ORIENTATION

Students are required to attend a **Post-Arrival Orientation**, per the Department of State. Your Community Manager (CM) will notify you of Post Arrival Orientations available in your area. If a host family cannot transport their student to an in-person Post-Arrival, please help the student network with others to find a ride. If the student cannot attend an in-person orientation, please ensure the student attends a virtual orientation, or plan to provide the student with a one-on-one orientation yourself (materials provided by your CM).

ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

During the first few months host families and students are learning to live together and may not be comfortable speaking openly in front of one another about their challenges. Meeting with students and host parents separately is strongly recommended.

- It is important that everyone feels they have been heard fully. Speaking to them directly and privately can help.
- Prior to coming to the home, inform the family you need an opportunity to chat with the student privately. Suggest taking a short walk, running out for coffee or ice cream, etc.
- It is important to request to speak with one or both host parents without the natural children to allow the parents to disclose more sensitive information that may include sibling rivalry, etc.

ADJUSTMENT PERIOD & CULTURE SHOCK

For some students, the newness wears off quickly and being overwhelmed comes fast. Many students go through culture shock in the first 30-days. To successfully support students and host families, please more information on culture shock at the end of this document.

BE THEIR ADVOCATE!

You are your students' and host families' unbiased advocate during the exchange year. This may be the first time these students have been away from home. Remain objective when speaking with all parties; if an issue arises.

- Never threaten to send students home! YFU is committed to working through challenges, since exchange is difficult.
- Remember, our students are teenagers and may not have all the skills and tools they need to adjust to a new situation on their own.
- Listen to both parties' concerns and help them develop problem solving skills. They will learn many of these during their Post Arrival Orientations. Help them review and implement these newly acquired skills.

BE A WATCHFUL COMMUNITY

If a concern arises during your regular monthly contact, please call or email your Support Services Manager (SSM) right away. Any suspicion or report of abuse or neglect must be reported immediately to YFU. If a serious event occurs outside of work hours, you can reach the on-call SSM by dialing 1.800.424.3691.



SCHOOL CONTACT

YFU recommends contacting the host high school about every three months; to check on how the student is doing socially and academically. Local Coordinators should ask the host family to list the LC as an emergency contact with the school.

REPLACEMENTS

YFU strongly discourages replacements (student moves) in the first 30-days, unless for student safety. This is a normal adjustment period for students, which they need to work through before we consider moving them. It is likely they will go through some culture shock and we want to encourage the students to keep trying.

As a reminder, host families agree to give a minimum of three weeks' notice for move requests to YFU. If replacement becomes necessary, students should be reassured that it is YFU's responsibility to find them a new host family; though any suggestions the student may have for a potential new host family are welcome.

ADMINISTRATIVE

THE FIRST STUDENT VISIT

It is required by the Department of State that every YFU student meet their Local Coordinator (LC) in person within the first two weeks of the student's arrival to the US. Please note the date of your in person contact with your student in your first monthly contact report.

SEE VISIT

The SEE Visit must be done within 60 days of the student arriving at the permanent host family and every 30 days for a student in an Arrival or Temporary placement until they are permanently placed. The SEE Visit must be documented in the student's file in my.YFU using the [SEE Visit form](#). Per the new Department of State guidelines, all people who conduct SEE visits must be vetted volunteers through YFU. They must now complete the [YFU SEE Visit Volunteer Application](#) and agree to a background check.

SUPPORT SKILLS TRAINING FOR LOCAL COORDINATORS

All Local Coordinators (LCs) should have completed the "Support Skills for Local Coordinators" training in YFU's LMS. If you have not yet completed this training, please do so asap.

GOING AWAY?

Please call or email your YFU Community Manager (CM) if you will be out of town for two or more weeks. Let your student, host family and CM know if you foresee a period of time when you will not be able to meet your commitment to return calls and emails promptly.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

FOR STUDENTS

How do you like school so far? What classes are you taking? How much time do you spend on homework?

Often, students compare things in the U.S. to their home country and teenagers tend to chat with each other and make comparisons. This is natural. Remind students that the differences aren't good or bad - they are just different. Over time, students will begin to separate judgment from observations. Remind them to be careful of sounding critical of the US in school and in their host home.



How often are you in touch with family and friends back home? Do you use your own computer? Your Host Family's computer?

Students need to be present in the US and making connections with their American family and friends. Remind students again that too much contact with home keeps them “virtually at home” and not fully engaged in the exchange experience. YFU recommends students limit their contact with home to once a week. Sometimes it is the parent back home putting pressure on their child, so try to find out who is the one struggling to let go. Suggest students keep a log of their texting, Facebook or WhatsApp messaging and email to their home county. They may be surprised at how much time they really spend! Remind them that the only way to learn to live in a new culture and family is by interacting with new people and trying different things.

How do you feel about your English skills? How well do you understand what your host family/ teachers/ friends say? Can you read your textbooks?

If the student seems to be really struggling after the first few weeks, let your CM know. Check in with the school to gather their report; the student's classes and/or schoolwork may need to be adjusted. Offer some suggestions for the student to help with English acquisition: read children's books out loud, change social media language to English, text in English, learn American songs, watch American tv with English subtitles on, put post it notes around the house with English words on them, and/or get involved in a social activity with other teenagers. Some students also use free apps such as Duolingo and Babel for additional assistance.

What has made you feel welcome in your host family? What do you know about each family member? What kinds of things have you done/talked about together?

Remind students that this is an EXCHANGE program. The choice of remaining a visitor or belonging to the family is up to them. Students shouldn't spend too much time alone and they should be open to invitations from their host family members and schoolmates. Asking questions and learning the routines, as well as actively participating in family life, will help them become more of a family member. Be alert for any hesitancy, reports of unwelcome behavior by family members, or a student being isolated. Any report of suspicious activity should be reported to YFU.

FOR FAMILIES

How is your family adjusting to having a new family member in the house?

Remind the family to treat the exchange student as a family member, not a guest. Host siblings may resent the student if the student isn't expected to do the same chores or if host siblings feel they have to share too much of their privacy or friends. Know your host families, as answers will vary greatly depending on if this is their first, 10th, or 20th time hosting.

How is your student adjusting to your family? What have you noticed - positive or negative - about their adjustment? Is he/she interacting with the family, willing to explore the local area, completing homework, etc.?

Speaking and interacting in English all day is exhausting for a non-native speaker. It is normal for exchange students to need breaks, and so short periods of time alone in their rooms to rest and recuperate is ok (and may be needed at the beginning). But it is not a good sign if a student is spending hours every week talking with friends and family back home. This may be the student's first response because he/she is looking for familiarity, however the best way to adjust is for host families to continue to encourage their students to join family activities!

Have you had any challenges in adjusting to your exchange son/daughter (language, diet preferences, school enrollment, personal hygiene, connections with home country, etc.)? Is there something I can do to help?

Getting used to a new person in the house with different cultural norms and routines can take some time. Sometimes challenges arise because families become offended by what exchange students say or do not say. What they don't realize is that it is usually due to limited vocabulary. Encourage families to gently explain to students how what they say is taken.



Reassure families that once a student becomes more comfortable in their home, they will become better at expressing themselves.

This is also an opportunity to check in with the host family and ask if they've had a chance to explain house rules such as bathroom times, bed times, snacking, transportation, etc. and that explaining these rules is important. Some things that may be obvious to a host family member (i.e. when it's appropriate to go to sleep or hanging out with friends), may vary greatly from the student's natural family's rules. Remind host families that appliances and plumbing vary greatly from country to country, and that they may need to explain which soap goes in the dishwasher or not to flush tampons, etc. down the toilet. Make sure to be clear!

How is your student's English - speaking as well as listening? Are you concerned by your student's English-speaking skills at home or at school? Tell me about some of the conversations you've had with your student.

If it sounds like a student needs language learning support, suggest that the host family encourage language learning apps. Offer the following tips: ask the student to read children's books to family members, ask the student to change their social media language to English, put post-it notes around the house with English words on them, watch tv with English subtitles turned on, join an extra-curricular activity, and ask the student to repeat back what family members say to them. Most of all, remind families to be patient and allow for time; learning a language is difficult!

CULTURE SHOCK

Many students experience culture shock around the beginning of the exchange year. Culture shock is the mind and body's reaction to being disoriented and feeling overwhelmed by a culture that is not familiar to you. Culture shock can cause psychological and physical discomfort.

LCs can help by reassuring students that culture shock is a normal part of the adjustment process and it will pass. Students experiencing culture shock may retreat to their bedroom and feel tired, depressed, and/or anxious. Students may not want to spend time with their host family or American teenagers and they may not want to speak English.

Common Symptoms of Culture Shock:

- Too much or too little sleep
- Homesickness and idealizing home
- Eating too much or no appetite
- Stomachaches, headaches, frequent minor illnesses
- Loneliness / social withdrawal
- Irritability / hostility
- Crying
- Stereotyping of host country people
- Great concern for health and security

Tips for Working Through Culture Shock:

Students should be reminded that culture shock is a normal part of adjustment. Students will have some symptoms and their reactions and behaviors may be emotional and not rational. Students should try to objectively analyze the differences between their home culture and their host culture. They should look for the reasons their host culture does things differently and remember that the host culture's customs are logical to them, just as the student's home culture customs are logical to the student.



Students should take it “day by day” and set small goals to redevelop their own sense of control over their life. Confiding in, and leaning on, the host family, American friends, and the Local Coordinator is helpful. Students should talk to people they trust about their feelings. Trusted people from the host culture can help the student understand ideas from their cultural point of view.

Students should focus on staying hydrated, eating healthy, refrain from excessive contact with home (this exacerbates culture shock), and make sure they are exercising and sleeping at night.

Encourage your students that they can push through and they *can* do it! If they push through the challenges, their exchange will be extremely rewarding!