



Opening Your Home

HOST FAMILY HANDBOOK



YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING
Intercultural Exchange Programs

Visit us at yfuusa.org

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Mission Statement

At Youth For Understanding (YFU), we aim to foster intercultural understanding, mutual respect, and social responsibility through educational exchanges for youth, families, and communities. Personal growth, development, and exploration are essential elements of the human experience, and we commit ourselves to providing opportunities for these experiences to occur.

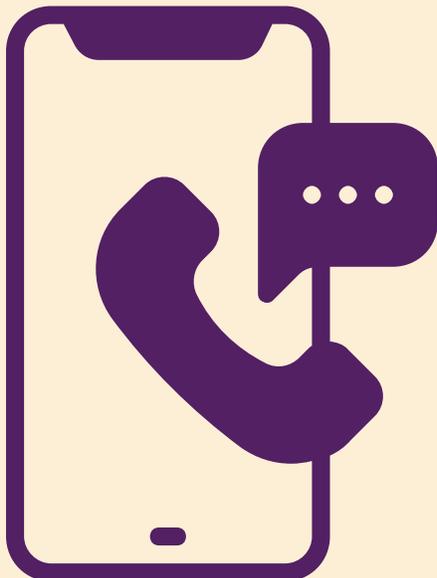
Acknowledgments

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“

It's a wonderful feeling when an exchange student asks if she can call her host parents mom and dad.

-Linda Pasewalk and Mark Graf,
YFU Host Parents



Important Contact Information

YFU USA National Office:

1.800.TEENAGE (1.800.833.6243)

YFU USA Travel Emergencies:

1.202.774.5211

YFU After-Hours Emergency Support:

1.800.424.3691

U.S. Department of State Student Helpline:

1.866.283.9090

Director's Letter

Dear YFU Family,

For over 70 years, YFU has thrived on the dedicated efforts and generosity of families opening their homes and hearts to international students. You are participating in a unique, life-changing experience that will expand your family across borders and cultures. As a former exchange student and as a host father myself, I know the positive, direct and profound impact that you will have on your student and the lives of young people both in your community and around the world.

There are so many wonderful stories from YFU families about the many ways in which students have grown and learned on program. Similarly, families grow too, seeing their own community and culture with fresh eyes. What you may perceive to be your ordinary life is extraordinary to an exchange student. You have an incredible opportunity to share your stories and traditions while introducing your family to a new culture.

Just as students are young ambassadors, recognize that you, too, are a cultural ambassador, just by being yourself. When you accept a host student into your life, you have an opportunity build greater understanding and be a catalyst in making us global citizens.

Thank you for bringing the world to your home, for enriching the life of a teenager, and for enhancing understanding through your incredible generosity.

On behalf of the students and with warm regards,



Scott Messing
National Director & CEO

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Welcome to YFU

Introduction to YFU

Welcome to Youth For Understanding (YFU) and thank you for hosting an international exchange student! This handbook offers key YFU policies, tips, and tools to help make your hosting experience rewarding for your family, your student, and your community.

YFU welcomes families of all backgrounds—whether you're a couple, single parent, same-sex couple, or individual, with or without children, in any type of community. We're proud that our host families reflect the diversity of the U.S., and we're grateful you're opening your home to share American life.

As you read, think about how these suggestions fit your unique family—and remember, YFU is here to support you every step of the way.

YFU's History

YFU was founded in 1951 to promote healing after World War II by bringing German and Austrian teens to the U.S. to experience life in a democratic society. The success of this initiative led to expansion across Europe, and by the late 1950s, YFU had launched programs in Japan, Latin America, and eventually across the Pacific and South America. In 1955, American students began studying abroad through YFU.

Today, YFU is one of the world's oldest and most respected exchange programs, operating in over 55 countries with more than 270,000 students exchanged globally. Through these experiences, students and host families build lifelong connections and foster greater global understanding.

YFU Legacy Grant

As a host family, your children AND grandchildren are automatically qualified for the YFU Legacy Grant if you host for at least 3 months combined before your own student's departure. This grant is worth \$1,000 towards any program tuition or scholarship co-pay. To apply, simply indicate your status as a host family in your student's online study abroad application.

Why YFU?

YFU is one of the world's most trusted exchange organizations, with decades of experience creating safe, meaningful cultural experiences. When you host with YFU, you're supported every step of the way—with expert guidance, 24/7 support, and a global network committed to student and family success.

Opportunities for International Students

YFU Traditional Homestay Program.

As a host family with a student on a J-1 visa (Exchange Visitor Secondary School Program), you are hosting as part of the YFU Traditional Homestay Program. A majority of YFU international students in the US are part of this program and these students come from YFU partner countries. Students on this program study at an American high school for a semester or a full academic year and live with an American family.

Opportunities for American Students and Others

YFU Study Abroad Programs

YFU offers Study Abroad Programs for American teenagers in more than **50 different countries**, and YFU awards more than **\$2 million** each year in scholarship funding. American students can choose to begin their journey in the spring (January-March), summer (June-July), or fall (August-September).

Most of the study abroad application is completed online, just like the host family application. Students also submit a teacher recommendation along with school and health information. All eligible applicants will also participate in an application interview with a YFU volunteer. Application deadlines for scholarships are typically in early January, and in mid-March for tuition-based programs. The best time to start thinking about studying abroad is in the beginning of the school year, before the planned departure date.

YFU awards **250+ merit-based scholarships** every year! Full and partial scholarships are available, and students can apply for more than one. Regional scholarships are also available to students living in certain parts of the United States.

Questions? Contact Study Abroad Admission at **1.800.TEENAGE (1.800.833.6243)**

Volunteer Programs

Committed to lifelong learning, YFU USA provides numerous volunteer opportunities for the 500,000+ American alumni, host siblings, and international students who now reside in the USA and beyond. Opportunities include facilitating orientations, writing student profiles, activities with students and host families, and more. Join the volunteer community and be an active part of this global organization. Visit yfuusa.org/volunteer for more details.

Who is YFU?

YFU Community

YFU is comprised of international partners, YFU USA staff, YFU volunteers, local educators, dedicated host families, and both recent and long-time alumni. There are many stakeholders committed to host families and the exchange students through this cross-cultural journey. Our support network includes:

- YFU USA Board of Trustees who provide strategic and governance oversight for the organization;
- A confederation of partners in 70+ plus countries, working together in trust and partnership and embracing the same standards of quality for exchange programs;
- Staff members based throughout the United States for whom the work is as much a calling as a job; and
- A global network of trained volunteers, including around 600 volunteers and Local Coordinators in the US to provide support to students and families.

YFU programs meet US State Department standards by:

- Screening and selecting qualified and motivated students in coordination with YFU partner organizations around the world;
- Supporting and monitoring students and host families during the exchange experience;
- Providing a series of orientation programs throughout the exchange;
- Assigning a trained Local Coordinator to each family/student as a personal YFU resource;
- Being in touch with the host family and student at least monthly for support and help; and
- Providing at least two in-person visits during the exchange experience.

YFU's Role As A Leader In Quality Standards For International Exchange

YFU adheres to exchange program standards designed to ensure safety and success for participants across its diverse programs.

US Department Of State J-1 Exchange Visitor Program

YFU is a US Department of State designated sponsor for J-1 Exchange Visitor Program Secondary School cultural exchanges. J-1 regulations provide important parameters for the safety, security, and well-being of J-1 semester/year YFU students. They recognize the host family's role in furthering public diplomacy and require YFU to follow specific protocols, especially related to the selection of US host families.

YFU International Basic Standards

YFU USA and its partners worldwide who send or host YFU students are committed to standards for high quality programs. These standards also include guidelines on the host family application and screening.

Council On Standards For International Educational Travel (CSIET)

YFU is a member of and certified by the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel, a leader for oversight to ensure safe, valuable exchanges. CSIET standards apply to international and American semester/ year high school students. These standards strengthen the host family selection process by YFU partners around the world.

Additionally, YFU partners with schools approved under the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) for F-1 academic exchanges.

YFU USA Staff

While your main contact may be your Local Coordinator or Community Manager (CM), they're supported by a dedicated YFU team of about 50 staff members working behind the scenes to ensure a meaningful experience for you and your student. The Placement Department handles student and host family matching, with CMs focusing on local outreach and support. They lead teams that organize orientations, social events, and provide direct assistance to families and students in their communities.

YFU also includes departments for Support Services, Volunteer Programs, Quality Assurance, and Education and Training—all designed to help students and families thrive. Support Services staff work closely with LCs to assist students on special programs, and the Education team provides training and resources. Additional departments like Finance, IT, and HR keep the organization running smoothly. Knowing your CM and field can be helpful when using YFU's website, Host Family Account, or Volunteer Portal.

Support from the YFU Community

Local Coordinators (LCs)

As a host family, you'll be supported by a dedicated YFU Local Coordinator (LC), a trained volunteer who understands the exchange experience—many have hosted or studied abroad themselves. Your LC is your go-to resource for guidance, helping you and your student navigate any questions or challenges. You'll receive their name and contact information in your student's placement confirmation letter. Your student will also receive this information before departure and on their YFU ID card after arriving in the U.S.

Your Local Coordinator (LC) checks in with both you and your student each month to support a smooth adjustment. They also serve as a neutral third party if challenges arise—whether it's cultural differences, language barriers, or typical teen issues. While YFU encourages families to talk through concerns directly with their student first, your LC is always available to offer guidance and perspective. The goal is to find solutions together—not assign blame—because these moments often lead to the greatest growth for both students and families.



We also encourage you to call your LC to share good news. Sharing good news allows you to develop bonds with your LC, which in turn makes you feel more comfortable in reaching out to your LC if problems arise. If you do not hear from your Local Coordinator monthly, please initiate contact with them. If your LC does not reply, contact your YFU Community Manager to let them know you are not receiving regular contact and to update them on how the exchange is progressing.

If your LC conducted your host family interview, another YFU representative will complete the Student Environment Evaluation (SEE) visit. The SEE visit is a US Department of State requirement that ensures safety for international minors by confirming that the student's living environment continues to meet the J-1 Exchange Visitor regulations assessed in the host family interview. The SEE visit occurs within 30-60 days of your student's arrival. You will be contacted about this visit by your LC or Community Manager.

Orientation Coordinators/Facilitators

YFU-trained volunteers and staff lead required orientations for all students. These sessions offer tools for cultural adjustment, communication, and building strong relationships. They also give you a chance to reflect on your experience and connect with others in the YFU community. Your Orientation Coordinator or Local Coordinator will contact you with event details—please RSVP so we can plan accordingly.

Your Local Coordinator is required to:

- Contact you and your student at least one time every month, either in-person, by telephone or by email
- Meet with you and your student, face-to-face, within 30 days of the student's arrival in your home
- Meet with you and your student, face-to face, at the beginning of the second semester (for year-long students)
- Maintain contact, via in-person meetings, telephone or email, with the school at the beginning, middle and end of the school year, at minimum



Thank You For Hosting

Being a Host Family

By welcoming an exchange student into your home, you're offering them a life-changing opportunity to experience everyday American life—something no tourist ever truly sees. Your role helps them understand U.S. culture, community, and family life on a deeper level. Treat your student as a family member, involving them in daily routines and expecting them to follow household rules. It takes time for everyone to adjust, but with patience and openness, your student will begin to feel like they truly belong.



Hosting Responsibilities

Host families play a key role in the YFU experience. The main responsibilities of a host family include:



1. Welcoming the student as a member of the family and caring for the student as a member of the family.

Host families provide a separate bed, a suitable study area, three meals per day, and an emotionally supportive environment. Host parents should also seek medical care for a student who becomes ill.



2. Helping students achieve their cultural and educational goals.

Host families contribute to a student's cultural education by helping them adapt to life with their host family, school, and local community. A supportive environment is needed while a student learns how to acclimate to this new setting. When challenges occur, we expect our host families to work with their student and Local Coordinator to communicate and resolve difficulties and misunderstandings.



3. Helping students meet YFU expectations.

Host families should become familiar with YFU policies and encourage students to adhere to those policies. Host families must complete the YFU Host Family Pre-Arrival Orientation and ensure the student attends YFU required orientations. Additionally, host families agree to be in touch with their YFU Local Coordinator at least once per month.

Host Family Agreement

When you became a YFU host family, you agreed to the Host Family Agreement, which outlines key responsibilities and includes important safety standards based on U.S. Department of State and YFU Global guidelines. If major life changes occur—like health issues, job changes, or shifts in household members—please inform your Local Coordinator. YFU understands life happens and is here to support you in finding the best path forward for both your family and your student.

Preparing For Your Student

It's never too early to start preparing for your exchange student. The following YFU recommendations and tools will help you get started:

Host Family Pre-Arrival Orientation

All host families must complete a required online YFU orientation and may be invited to a local event. The orientation covers key hosting info, cultural adjustment tips, and connects you with other families.

Host Family Online Account

Your account includes student details, YFU policies, insurance info, and helpful tools to support your hosting journey.

Prepare medical info.

Review your student's insurance details in your Host Family account. Know which local clinics and hospitals accept the policy. Keep copies of the insurance card and policy in your car and at home for emergencies.

Set clear expectations early.

Talk as a family about your household rules and routines. Create a simple list to share with your student in the first week—include chores, curfews, communication, and family activities.

Learn about your student's culture.

Take time to understand your student's home country—its customs, family life, and values.

Create a welcoming space.

Prepare a cozy room and small touches like toiletries or favorite foods. These gestures help your student feel at home from day one.

Connect with the YFU community.

Reach out to your local YFU contact and other host families. Their experiences can offer valuable tips and support.

Reach out before arrival.

Send a message or set up a video call to introduce yourselves. It helps ease nerves and builds early connection.

Communicate directly.

Once your student arrives, keep communication open between you and them. Avoid relying on their natural parents to manage issues—YFU is here to support you.

Welcome Ideas

- Make a welcome sign with student's name to greet him or her at the airport.
- Decorate the bedroom with the local high school colors and themes.
- Purchase school supplies so he or she is ready for the first day of school.
- Make a Welcome kit with local maps, the community newspaper, and other resources that the student can read to become more familiar with the area.
- Having a small cookout or meal with close family friends is a great idea to welcome the student and introduce him or her to your community. However, wait a few weeks (or more) before you do this. Meeting many people within the first weeks can overwhelm a student.

**Welcome
to the
USA**

Your Student

Motivations and Expectations

Students come on exchange for many reasons—some seek adventure, others want to learn about U.S. culture, and many hope to build lasting relationships. When your student arrives, ask about their motivations. Understanding their goals will help you support their experience and guide them through cultural adjustment.

Students often arrive with expectations shaped by movies or social media, which may not reflect everyday life. Talk openly about your home, school, and community to help set realistic expectations. These conversations are great opportunities to build trust, correct misconceptions, and foster meaningful learning.

Common and Unrealistic Expectations

“My host family will be rich.”

Many students expect American families to be wealthy and live like those in movies. They may be surprised by a more typical lifestyle and by being asked to do chores. Use this as a teaching moment—explain the diversity of American families, demonstrate household tasks, and talk openly about spending expectations.

“I will travel and see all of the US.”

Students often assume they’ll travel extensively across the U.S. Help them understand that the exchange is about daily life, not tourism. Share your family’s travel plans early, and discuss any costs involved if trips require their financial contribution.

“School in the US will be easy for me.”

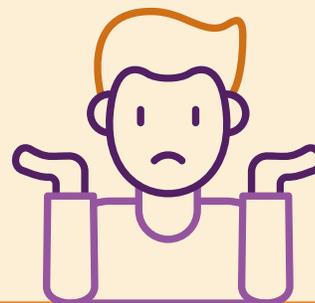
Students may think U.S. school will be easy or less serious. Encourage them to explore extracurriculars and take academics seriously. Remind them that their visa requires good standing and adherence to school policies.

“I will feel comfortable with my family right away.”

Students may expect to feel instantly comfortable or assume your family will be just like theirs. Talk about how your family communicates and spends time together. Learn about their background and highlight differences as part of the learning experience—emphasizing that no one way is better.

“I’ll Have No Rules in the U.S.”

Some students arrive thinking, “In the U.S., I can do whatever I want.” While personal freedom is valued, American families also prioritize responsibility, safety, and mutual respect. Be clear about your household’s rules—curfews, transportation limits, and expectations for communication. Setting boundaries early helps students feel secure and supported.



Student Preparations

Prior to arriving in the US, students are preparing for their exchange. Just as you are required to participate in a Host Family Pre-Arrival Orientation, students will participate in Pre-Departure Orientation in their home country. During this orientation, they will learn about YFU policies and procedures, cross-cultural communication, and adjustment skills, and they will talk about potential challenges when living in a new environment and the experience of culture shock. In addition, all students are advised to download the YFU USA student handbook **Passport to the USA**, to reference in the US. Ask your student about this handbook and review it together.

All students must meet English language minimums. Prior to arrival, many students take intensive language classes to strengthen their skills. If you become concerned about your student’s English skills, make sure to contact your Local Coordinator for assessment and additional resources, if needed.

Student And Family Policies

All YFU students are expected to follow the rules and policies set by their host family, school, YFU USA, and YFU international partners. YFU policies protect the safety and well-being of participants and help everyone have a successful exchange experience. Below are some key policies which cover areas of student safety, legal issues, and behaviors that can interfere with student adjustment. Please review all policies so you are familiar with YFU expectations for students and families.

Dangerous Activities

YFU takes safety and security of students and families very seriously and wants to minimize risks for student accidents. For this reason, there are important policies and stipulations concerning student participation in activities that are considered dangerous. Many activities require training from a professional; the use of safety equipment; and additional insurance to cover any injuries. In addition, some activities require a Dangerous Activities Permission Form to be completed. **Please ask your YFU Support Services Manager for the Dangerous Activities Form for your student.**

Driving Is Prohibited

This includes cars, trucks, jeeps, ATV, snowmobiles, e-scooters, motorcycles, boats etc. Students will be sent home for breaking this policy. Students can operate riding lawn mowers if mowing the lawn is a family chore.

School Attendance and Behavior

Students are required to attend school on a regular basis, work hard in their classes, and maintain a good standing in the school. Poor grades due to poor effort, disrespectful behavior, or breaking school policies are not tolerated. The Local Coordinator monitors school performance and YFU expects all students to maintain a "C" minimum.

Student Adjustment

Other policies focus on behaviors that can interfere with a student's adjustment and having a successful exchange experience. These include the overuse or abuse of electronics or social media. Excessive communication with friends and family in the student's home country will prevent successful adaptation. Students are responsible for the content they post online. Inappropriate social media posting can result in an early return to one's home country.

Travel

Student travel with their school, YFU, or with your family is encouraged. However, for legal and safety reasons some travel stipulations and approvals are required for certain trips. These include travel without the host family or LC for more than five days; or travel outside the USA (including Mexico and Canada); or if the host family is asking the student to contribute more than \$300; or if the travel requires the student to miss more than five days of school.

US, State, And Local Laws

Additionally, students are expected to follow all US, state, and local community laws. YFU policies follow US laws regarding alcohol and drug use. Students and families also need to respect local laws concerning curfews and riding as a passenger with new drivers.

Policy Violation

All students and host families are expected to follow YFU policies and complete required forms (see Appendix IV). Violations may result in consequences, including the student's early return home. Students should follow household rules and are encouraged to ask questions if anything is unclear. If a student challenges a rule or policy, respond with patience and explanation. Contact your Local Coordinator (LC) if issues persist.

Host families may set appropriate consequences for broken rules, such as limiting social time or internet use. Notify your LC if a student repeatedly breaks rules or violates a serious one. YFU may issue warnings, probation, or recommend early return depending on the situation. This applies to violations of household, YFU, or school policies.



Students and host families must follow all US Department of State requirements regarding international travel and documentation. If a student leaves the US without proper documentation, passport and Certificate of Eligibility/DS-2019, the student's visa could be terminated in the Homeland Security Student & Exchange Visitor Information System database (SEVIS) and the student would be refused re-entry to the US. See Appendix III for an example of the DS-2019 form. Make sure your student keeps this important US Department of State document with the passport.

YFU Support

Support Services Managers (SSM) And The Department Of Support Services

The YFU Department of Support Services works with Local Coordinators (LC), Support Services Managers (YFU staff), host families, and students to help resolve any questions or concerns that occur during the exchange year. Each field has a Support Services Manager (SSM) who is trained in counseling and managing international exchange student support issues. The SSMs and Support staff operate the YFU after-hours emergency support phone line, which you can use to report and receive help with student-related legal or medical emergencies occurring after regular business hours (1.800.424.3691). The SSM's goal is to work with students and families to resolve issues and ensure safety, security, and emotional well-being for both the student and the family.

Your Support Services Manager (SSM) may get involved when challenges arise, whether initiated by your Local Coordinator (LC), school, student, or your family. SSMs offer guidance, coordinate resources like counseling, and handle serious issues such as home or school changes, medical needs, or emergency returns. They also issue warnings or probation letters when needed.

In cases involving a change in placement, your LC may also work with the Community Manager (CM). Together, the LC, SSM, and CM may contact you to help resolve complex situations and ensure the best outcome for everyone involved.

YFU International Partners

Your student's YFU country office is a key resource for cultural insight and communication with their natural parents. If serious issues arise—such as behavioral concerns, medical needs, or emergency returns—your Support Services Manager (SSM) will contact the Sending Organization for guidance and support. They are trained in exchange-related issues and fluent in both English and the student's native language. For emergencies or sensitive matters, always reach out to your SSM first.



Support from Your Local Coordinator (LC)

Your assigned LC serves as the primary support person and unbiased advocate for both you and your student. When a challenge arises, your LC will confer with your field's Support Services Manager (SSM) to discuss any policy or support-related issues. Your LC, SSM, and Community Manager (CM) may all provide you support in a variety of ways. They are in regular communication to resolve a case to ensure safety, security and emotional well-being for all parties.

Respond to communications from your LC. Also, talk with your student about responding to their LC. YFU relies on LCs to communicate directly with students. The US State Department requires monthly communication between the LC and the student and the host family. If your LC calls or sends an email, please respond right away.



When A Student Needs To Move

Often there can be conflict as students and families adjust to one another. YFU encourages families and students to work through challenges together, as this is a natural part of the adjustment process, and this process typically strengthens the family-student relationship. Local Coordinators are trained to mediate when there is conflict. Bringing the LC in for assistance is a useful way to get the relationship back on track. However, sometimes even with mediation, a student needs to be moved to a new family. This can occur for a variety of reasons, and YFU does not "blame" families when a placement does not work out. If a student needs to be moved for whatever reason, SSMs and CMs will facilitate this process in a responsible, respectful way.

Cross-Cultural Learning & Tips

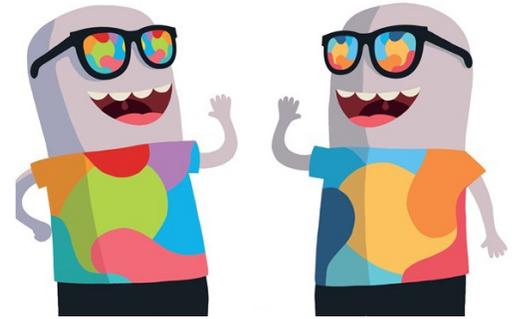
From Other Host Families

Cultural Iceberg And Colored Glasses

YFU uses two key analogies to help students and families explore culture: the Cultural Iceberg and Colored Glasses.

The **Cultural Iceberg** shows that visible traits like food, language, and behavior are just the surface—most of culture lies beneath in values, beliefs, and attitudes. These deeper elements shape how people think and act.

The **Colored Glasses** analogy reminds us that we all view the world through our own cultural lens. Even when immersed in a new culture, we interpret experiences through our own background. Recognizing this helps students better understand differences and adapt with openness and respect.



Colored Glasses Fable

Imagine that here in the U.S., from the time of the first people, today and far into the future, everyone that was ever born or will ever be born has two legs, two arms, two eyes, a nose, a mouth AND a pair of sunglasses. The color of the lenses in the sunglasses is YELLOW. No one has ever thought it strange that the sunglasses are there because they've always been there, and they are part of the human body. Everyone has them. Everything that people have seen, learned, or experienced (past, present or future) has been filtered through a yellow lens.

A few hundred miles away in another country (France, for example), from the time of the first people, today and far into the future, everyone that was ever born or will be born was born with two legs, two arms, two eyes, a nose, a mouth AND a pair of sunglasses. The color of the lens in the sunglasses is BLUE. No one has ever thought it strange that the sunglasses are there because they've always been there, and they are part of the human body. Everyone has them. Everything that the French people see, learn and experience is filtered through these blue lenses.

An American who wants to go to France may have enough sense to realize that to truly learn about France, they will have to acquire some French sunglasses so that they can experience France the way the French do. When the American traveler arrives in France, they buy some blue sunglasses and puts them on, stay for two months and feel they really are learning not only about the food, language and sites in France, but also why the French behave the way they do. They actually understand the French because they have been wearing their sunglasses.

They then return to the U.S. and declares that they are now an 'expert' on France – “they see everything filtered through a GREEN lens!”

Personal Culture

YFU encourages families and students to reflect on their personal culture—shaped by ethnicity, traditions, language, values, and everyday behaviors. It also includes individual traits like preferences, talents, and relationships.

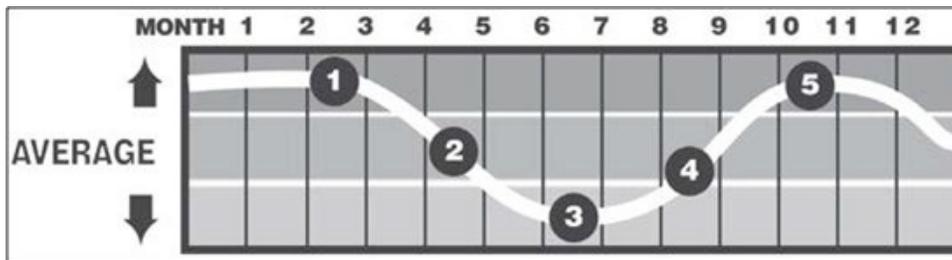
Understanding personal culture helps avoid assumptions. Even neighbors in the same community can have very different family cultures. Recognizing these differences prepares you to better understand your student's unique background and enriches the exchange experience for everyone.

Family And Student Adjustment Process

Cultural adjustment takes time, and differences in behavior—like table manners, greetings, chores, and communication—can lead to misunderstandings. Talk with your student early about household expectations and U.S. norms, which may vary even within the country. Use these moments to guide and teach, helping your student navigate unfamiliar customs.

Your student may act in ways that are normal in their culture but surprising to you. Let them know you're here to help them learn and adjust. Encourage open conversations about cultural differences, and clearly explain when a behavior isn't acceptable in your home or community. Both students and families go through stages of adjustment—known as the Cultural Adjustment Curve—and understanding this process can help you support your student through ups and downs.

The graphic below shows a general pattern, but be aware your student's process may differ with multiple high and low periods.



Stage 1:

Honeymoon Phase – “Isn’t That Interesting”

Student is excited and curious about everything—new foods, people, and experiences.

May enjoy being the center of attention.

Some students skip this stage if overwhelmed by the new environment.

Stage 2:

Settling In – “The Thrill Is Gone”

Routine begins; novelty fades.

Student adjusts to daily life and is no longer the focus of attention.

May feel less enthusiastic as the pace slows.

Stage 3:

Culture Shock – “How Can They Live Like That?”

Homesickness and confusion about cultural norms may set in.

Student may feel isolated or frustrated and seek comfort in familiar cultural connections.

Holidays can intensify feelings of being an outsider.

Open communication and support are key during this stage.

Stage 4:

Adjustment – “Let’s Get On With It”

Student begins to understand and accept cultural differences.

Language improves, friendships grow, and confidence builds.

Student often decides to make the most of the remaining time.

Stage 5:

Integration – “I Feel at Home”

Student feels comfortable and functions well in the host culture.

May adopt behaviors once seen as strange.

Reflects on personal growth and prepares emotionally for returning home.

This stage can be both celebratory and bittersweet.



Understanding Culture Shock

Culture shock is a normal reaction to living (and even visiting) a foreign culture. Your student will likely need you and your family to provide support and help them navigate all the ups and downs of understanding a new culture and handling culture shock.

Put Yourself In Their Shoes

Culture shock isn't limited to international travel—it can happen when starting a new job, moving, or meeting people very different from yourself. Feelings like confusion, frustration, or exhaustion are common when adjusting to unfamiliar situations. Reflecting on your own experiences with change can help you better understand and support your student. There are both physiological and psychological signs of culture shock. Here are some:

Physiological Symptoms

- Sleepiness or insomnia
- Compulsive eating or loss of appetite
- Recurrent minor illnesses and rashes
- Upset stomach
- Headaches

Psychological Symptoms

- Loneliness or boredom
- Homesickness and overly idealized feelings about home
- Sense of helplessness, over-dependence
- Irritability, or perhaps hostility
- Social withdrawal
- Unwarranted concern for cleanliness and/or physical security
- Rebellion against rules
- Crying



Any of these indicators alone do not necessarily mean that your student is finding their adjustment difficult. Look at your student's total behavior to determine if they need help in coping with culture shock.

Helping Your Student Through Culture Shock

When your student shows signs of culture shock ask them what (even if seemingly insignificant), is contributing to the discomfort. Simply finding out what is bugging the student to understand why they are frustrated or confused may relieve the situation a bit.



Help Them Set Goals

Setting goals helps your student stay engaged and build confidence during their adjustment. Talk with them about specific, achievable goals—such as starting a conversation with a classmate or learning how to use public transportation to reach a local destination.

Encourage goals that promote language learning, independence, and interaction with the community. For example, your student might aim to learn ten new English words each day or spend time outside the home engaging with Americans. Each small success will boost their confidence and ease the effects of culture shock.

Students might have very critical (and even absurd) views of American life while they are going through culture shock.

It is not easy for us to hear criticism of American habits without becoming defensive. You may be particularly sensitive to these negative views because your family is trying to be supportive to your student. Be patient and try to understand that your student is processing a lot of new information. Sometimes students are exhausted, and this can result in extreme behavior, including being overly critical about things they don't understand. Also, keep in mind they may be expressing themselves through the limited English vocabulary that they have.

Common Adjustment Challenges

Host parents and Local Coordinators list these adjustment areas between families and students as most common and sometimes more difficult than others.

Curfew

Many students may resist curfews, viewing them as a lack of trust. Explain your household rules clearly, and apply them consistently to all teens in your home. If unsure what's reasonable, ask other families or your Local Coordinator. Also, be aware of any local curfew laws.

Setting Boundaries

Exchange students are minors under your care. Set clear boundaries and review them together within the first week. Use the "How Do You Do Things In Your Home" handout (Appendix V) to guide the conversation.

Discipline

If your student breaks a rule, apply fair consequences—such as limiting screen time or social activities—just as you would with your own children. Discuss the behavior calmly and avoid criticism. Physical punishment is never acceptable.

Religion and Religious Practices

Some students may assume Americans aren't religious or worry about being placed in a highly religious home. In the U.S., religious activities often serve both spiritual and social purposes, which may be unfamiliar to them. YFU encourages students to try all family activities, but religious services are optional. You may invite your student to attend, but ongoing participation is their choice. Host families should not pressure students to attend regularly or attempt to convert them. If your student practices a different faith, help them connect with a local place of worship or youth group if possible. Be respectful of their beliefs—whether deeply religious or not—and approach this topic with openness and understanding.

Drinking

The legal drinking age in the U.S. is 21. Students who break this law will be placed on Probation immediately and their sending office and natural parents will be notified. Further violations of YFU rules and/or US law will result in an early return. While some may be used to drinking casually in their home country, explain U.S. norms and monitor behavior. Contact your Local Coordinator if concerns arise.

Sibling Rivalry

Jealousy between host siblings and exchange students is common. Your children may feel they're losing attention or space, while the student may not understand these feelings. Avoid asking your children to make sacrifices, like always including the student in outings. Involve them in preparing for the student's arrival so they feel included. Balance your attention between all children and check in with your own kids about how they're feeling. If tensions arise, talk openly as a family. Your Local Coordinator can help if needed. With care and communication, sibling rivalry can become an opportunity for growth for everyone.

Money

As a host family, **you are not expected to bear any financial burden beyond the normal necessities of food and housing.** This means that host families are responsible for providing three meals a day, including a bagged lunch or lunch money for school. If you're unfamiliar with high school lunch costs, check with your local school—prices typically range from \$3 to \$8. A bagged lunch is a cost-effective option and can be part of your student's daily routine.

Students are expected to cover personal expenses with funds from their natural parents. Some host families choose to give their student a small allowance in exchange for chores, similar to what they provide their own children, though this is optional. A good rule of thumb is to pay for what you cover for your own children (e.g., family outings), and let students pay for personal activities.

Most students use free internet services to stay in touch with home. YFU recommends using a YFU-provided SIM card or prepaid calling card to avoid charges to your phone bill. Any phone-related costs should be discussed and paid promptly to prevent misunderstandings.

Students may wait to buy clothes in the U.S. due to cost or availability. Help them find affordable shopping options. Talk with your student about their budget and how long their funds should last. Many use debit or credit cards from home—explain ATM fees and help them research local banking options. **Host families must not co-sign or open joint accounts.**

Some students may need help learning basic budgeting skills. Discuss money management openly and offer guidance. Students may do informal work (e.g., babysitting, yard work) up to 10 hours per week, but cannot hold formal jobs due to visa restrictions.

Students should avoid borrowing or lending money, even with host families. If you loan money in an emergency, document the agreement and notify your Local Coordinator. YFU is not responsible for personal debts between students and host families.

If your student appears to lack sufficient funds, contact your Local Coordinator. Students must first request money from home and inform YFU of any arrangements with their natural parents.

Open, Direct Communication

Is Best If your student has a habit that's culturally inappropriate or disruptive, talk to them directly—don't vent to others. One student was deeply hurt after overhearing their host parent complain to a neighbor instead of addressing the issue with them. Just as students are encouraged to speak with their host family or Local Coordinator when problems arise, host families should offer the same respect. Clear, honest communication helps prevent misunderstandings and builds trust.

Tips From Other Host Families

Following are tips from past families to help you get through the first 24 hours, the first week, and onwards through the exchange.

The First 24 Hours

Take a Pause Before Heading Home

Airports can be overwhelming, especially after a long international flight. If possible, stop at a nearby café for a snack and a relaxed face-to-face chat. This helps break the ice and makes the journey home more comfortable—especially if it's long or your student hasn't eaten.

Expect Fatigue and Sensory Overload

Your student will likely be tired and overstimulated. Allow time for rest or sleep as needed. Keep the first few days flexible and low-key. Avoid hosting guests on the first day, but introduce neighbors and friends gradually over the next few days.

Home Orientation

Start by showing your student their room, bathroom, towels, and where to find water or snacks if they wake up early. Keep it simple—just the basics. Mention only essential rules (like knocking before entering the bathroom), and let them know you'll go over more family guidelines in a few days.

The First Weeks

During the first few weeks, orient your student to the immediate surroundings within your neighborhood and community so they can begin to function on their own.

Introduce Your Family & Household Norms

Every family has its own routines and “unwritten rules.” Take time to explain who does what and when in your household. Plan a family meeting early on to go over expectations, schedules, and house rules. Be clear and open—don't let concerns build up. Open communication is key.

Daily Schedules & Planning

Your student may find your family's comings and goings confusing at first. Encourage them to share their plans in advance, especially if transportation is needed. A shared family calendar can help everyone stay informed.

How Your Family Communicates

Let your student know how your family typically communicates—whether by text, in person, or through a calendar. Be clear about how they should ask for permission or share plans.

Explore the Neighborhood

Show your student around your neighborhood and how to use public transportation if available. A simple map with key locations—like grocery stores, banks, and neighbors—can be helpful.

Help with Essentials

Assist your student with tasks like shopping, exchanging money, or using an ATM. These everyday activities can be challenging in a new country. Encourage thoughtful spending, especially early on.

Visit the School

Take your student on a tour of their school. Help with registration if needed, and show them how they'll get there—by bus, walking, biking (with a helmet), or carpooling. If no one else in your home attends the same school, introduce them to local students who do.

Activities & Making Friends

Students may feel unsure about how to get involved. Help them meet peers and find activities they enjoy. Once connections are made, encourage them to take initiative in building friendships.

Respect Their Need for Downtime

If your student opts out of a family activity, don't take it personally. They may just need time to rest and adjust.

Treat Them Like Family

Avoid treating your student like a guest beyond the first couple of days. Include them in routines, responsibilities, and family life. This helps set clear expectations and fosters a sense of belonging.

Physical Adjustments

Students may experience minor health issues like stomach upset or fatigue due to travel, diet changes, or stress. These usually resolve with time. If symptoms persist, consult a doctor and inform your Local Coordinator.

Medical Emergencies & Insurance

Students arrive with a medical release form and insurance. Keep copies of both with you. Never list yourself as the responsible party for medical bills—use the student's name, YFU, or their natural parents. Report all medical issues to your Local Coordinator.

Understanding Insurance

Review the student's insurance policy with them. Help them understand how to file claims. Do not pay their medical expenses—students are responsible for costs not covered by insurance.

Immunizations

Your student may need additional vaccinations to enroll in school. Help them access these, and ensure they have funds to cover the cost. Local health departments or retail clinics often offer affordable options.



9-1-1 and Emergency Situations

Don't forget to talk with your student about emergencies. Is your area prone to tornadoes or earthquakes? Your student may have never experienced anything like this and has no idea about typical safety practices. Review family safety plans, such as going to the basement for tornadoes, or the location of the fire extinguisher. Take nothing for granted with safety, talk with your student about extreme weather and how your family stays safe.

Explain the uses of 9-1-1 and provide examples of when the student should use this service. Lastly, make sure your student learns the spelling of your names, your cell phone number, and your home address within the first 48 hours of arrival.

After the Honeymoon Period and throughout the exchange

Many students and host families experience the “honeymoon” period when everyone is on their best behavior, and everything is new and wonderful. After several weeks, however, routine sets in and things start to look more normal and less exciting. Problems may arise that you didn't expect at first. Allow yourself, your student, or your family time to adjust to each other. Create an open atmosphere for sharing and remember that differences will be with you all year. Involve your Local Coordinator in the early stage of this adjustment.

Remember, it is normal to have challenges along the way. Hopefully, by going through these ups and downs, your family grows and is enriched by this experience.



Your Last Weeks Together

Saying goodbye can be emotional for both your family and your student, especially if strong bonds have formed. Mixed feelings—sadness, anxiety, even envy—are common as departure approaches. It's important to acknowledge these emotions and talk openly with each other. Connecting with your Local Coordinator or other host families can offer support and reassurance during this transition.

Your student may also feel conflicted—excited to return home, yet sad to leave. They've likely grown in confidence and perspective, which may surprise their natural family. Help your student prepare for reverse culture shock by discussing how they've changed, what to expect upon returning, and how to share their experience. Attending the Re-Entry Orientation together is a valuable way to reflect and prepare for the next chapter.

Appendix I: YFU Contact Information

YFU USA National Office:

3995 Fashion Square Blvd
Suite 2
Saginaw, Michigan 48603
USA

Phone: 1.202.774.5200

Toll-Free: 1.800.TEENAGE (1.800.833.6243)

Fax: 1.877.231.2681

Website: yfuusa.org

If you need assistance with a medical or legal emergency with your on-program student, please call **1.800.424.3691** to reach our on-call team member. This line is monitored 24 hours a day. If this is a YFU Travel Emergency, please call **1-800-705-9510**.

Appendix II: US Department of State Host Family Letter



U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Private Sector Exchange



January 8, 2024

Dear American Host Family:

Welcome to the U.S. Department of State's BridgeUSA Exchange Visitor Program! On behalf of the U.S. Department of State, we would like to thank you for your decision to host an international exchange student. People-to-people exchanges are a valuable tool of foreign policy. BridgeUSA programs allow you to experience first-hand the richness and diversity of a culture different from your own, as you exemplify American values and culture to an exchange student. Through this program, you will join thousands of American families who serve as citizen ambassadors of the United States. Many families have found hosting an exchange student to be a rewarding and memorable experience.

High School exchange programs have been a part of U.S. public diplomacy efforts since 1949. Approximately 20,000 exchange students from around the world participate in this program each year. The good will of American host families in opening their homes to these young international visitors is vital to this program's success. The exchange student is a guest in your home and in our country and you may be the first Americans this young person meets. Your hospitality will create a lasting impression of our country and its people.

The health, safety, and well-being of the young people who participate in this program are our highest priority. A host family has many responsibilities, the most important of which is properly caring for an international student during his/her program. The regulations governing the secondary school student program are found at eCFR — [Exchange Visitor Program regulations](#) (22 CFR 62 - Exchange Visitor Program). These regulations address the most frequently asked questions about the program and provide the rules under which the program operates. It is extremely important that you notify your sponsor representative if you have any concerns or if the exchange student's personal health, safety, or well-being is threatened in any way. If the sponsoring organization is not responsive to your concerns, you should contact the Department of State directly through our J-1 Visa Emergency Helpline 1-866-283-9090, which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or by e-mail at JVisas@state.gov.

The BridgeUSA program will create a strong life-long bond between you, your international student, and your local community. We are pleased that you made the decision to be part of this impactful exchange program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca A. Pasini".

Rebecca A. Pasini
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Private Sector Exchange

Appendix III: DS-2019 Sample Form



U.S. Department of State

CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY FOR EXCHANGE VISITORS (J VISA) STATUS

OMB APPROVAL NO.
07/31/2014
ESTIMATED BURDEN TIME: 45 min
*See Page 2

1. Family Name: _____		First Name: _____		Middle Name: _____		Gender: _____	
Date of Birth (mm-dd-yyyy): _____		City of Birth: _____		Country of Birth: _____		Citizenship Country Code: _____	
Citizenship Country: _____		Legal Permanent Residence Country Code: _____		Legal Permanent Residence Country: _____		Position Code: _____	
Position: _____		Primary Site of Activity: _____					
2. Program Sponsor: Youth For Understanding USA, Inc.						Program Number: _____	
Participating Program Official Description: _____							
Purpose of this form: _____							
3. Form Covers Period:				4. Exchange Visitor Category:			
From (mm-dd-yyyy): _____				Subject/Field Code: _____			
To (mm-dd-yyyy): _____				Subject/Field Code Remarks: _____			
5. During the period covered by this form, the total estimated financial support (in U.S. \$) is to be provided to the exchange visitor by: _____							
6. U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE / DHS USE OR CERTIFICATION BY RESPONSIBLE OFFICER OR ALTERNATE RESPONSIBLE OFFICER THAT A NOTIFICATION COPY OF THIS FORM HAS BEEN PROVIDED TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (INCLUDE DATE).				7.			
				Name of Official Preparing Form		Title	
				641 S Street, NW			
				Suite 200			
				Washington, DC, 20003		Telephone Number	
				Signature of Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer		Date (mm-dd-yyyy)	
8. Statement of Responsible Officer for Releasing Sponsor (FOR TRANSFER OF PROGRAM)							
Effective date (mm-dd-yyyy): _____ Transfer of this exchange visitor from program number _____ sponsored by _____							
to the program specified in item 2 is necessary or highly desirable and is in conformity with the objectives of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, as amended.							
Signature of Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer				Date (mm-dd-yyyy) of Signature			
PRELIMINARY ENDORSEMENT OF CONSULAR OR IMMIGRATION OFFICER REGARDING SECTION 212(e) OF THE IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT AND PL 94-484, AS AMENDED (see item 1(a) of page 2).						TRAVEL VALIDATION BY RESPONSIBLE OFFICER (Maximum validation period is 1 year *)	
The Exchange Visitor in the above program:						*EXCEPT: Maximum validation period is up to 6 months for Short-term Scholars and 4 months for Camp Counselors and Summer Work/Travel.	
1. <input type="checkbox"/> Not subject to the two-year residence requirement.						(1) Exchange Visitor is in good standing at the present time	
2. <input type="checkbox"/> Subject to two-year residence requirement based on:						_____	
A. <input type="checkbox"/> Government financing and/or						Date (mm-dd-yyyy)	
B. <input type="checkbox"/> The Exchange Visitor Skills List and/or						Signature of Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer	
C. <input type="checkbox"/> PL 94-484 as amended						(2) Exchange Visitor is in good standing at the present time	
_____						_____	
Name						Title	
_____						Date (mm-dd-yyyy)	
Signature of Consular or Immigration Officer						Signature of Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer	
THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE RESERVES THE RIGHT TO MAKE FINAL DETERMINATION REGARDING 212 (e).						Date (mm-dd-yyyy)	
EXCHANGE VISITOR CERTIFICATION: I have read and agree with the statement in item 2 on page 2 of this document.							
_____				_____		_____	
Signature of Applicant				Place		Date (mm-dd-yyyy)	

Appendix IV: Policies And Procedures

YFU maintains policies to ensure fairness to the students and families, consistent standards, and program integrity. The following policies provide a framework for the YFU participant support system. This support system includes the host family and host community, the involved YFU organizations, and the natural family. These policies are standard for all YFU students, and we ask host families to help ensure that they are followed.

Students are informed of YFU policies before arrival in the US. After arrival, students and host families should review the student handbook, **Passport to the USA**, together. This will help establish mutual understanding of program requirements and open communication.

In the past, some well-meaning host parents have allowed their exchange students to disregard some YFU policies. Please do not violate YFU policy and risk Early Return for a student. This cautionary note is particularly important regarding the driving policy.

This appendix contains the international student policies of YFU, as well as specific procedures for YFU programs in the US. If you need additional clarification, please contact your Local Coordinator.

Alcohol And Tobacco

Policy:

Students are required to observe all laws of their host country regarding the legal age for alcohol and tobacco consumption. Students are also expected to follow host family guidelines on the use of alcohol and tobacco, including e-cigarettes. YFU students should not use alcohol in a manner that is excessive, unsuitable or embarrassing to the host family or YFU. A student will be considered for Early Return if they demonstrate an inability to control their use of alcohol.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

The legal drinking age in the United States is 21. It is against the law for anyone under the age of 21 to purchase, possess, carry/hold or drink alcoholic beverages in the US. Since YFU high school students are under 21, violations of this law also violate YFU USA program policy. Alcohol use is cause for Early Return. Insurance may not cover alcohol related medical treatment.

It is illegal for minors (under age 18) to purchase or use tobacco products and for anyone under 21 to purchase, possess and/or use e-cigarettes (vapes/Juul). Tobacco use risks arrest, fines, jail, suspension from school and removal from extra-curricular activities, including sports. Students also risk being asked to leave the host family and Early Return. Students who smoke should make every effort to quit and to not smoke while in the US.

Breaking The Law

Policy:

The nature and severity of the offense will determine the procedure and possible outcome. Criminal prosecution, theft, or shoplifting may be cause for an Early Return. The student, not YFU or the host family, will be responsible for any expense incurred as a result of the consequence.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

When an arrest is made or a court appearance is scheduled, YFU USA recommends the student acquire a lawyer. Students and natural parents are responsible for all legal costs. YFU reserves the right to make a decision regarding the student's program status, regardless of any legal decision.

If a student is convicted of an offense requiring them to stay in the US, or the court date is after the regular end date, YFU will consider the student Off Program as of the prescheduled return flight time. The student and natural parents, not the host family, will be responsible for any and all necessary arrangements.

A student aged 18 or older who engages in sexual activity with a minor below the age of consent (generally 16-18) is guilty of gross sexual imposition and will be tried as an adult, regardless of the presence of force or threat associated with the sexual act. By law, any such sexual activity between an adult over 18 and a person below the age of consent is assumed to be coercive and nonconsensual. Gross sexual imposition is a serious offense for which offenders can receive lengthy prison sentences. Laws about gross sexual imposition vary among states.

Confidentiality

Policy:

For some issues that arise in YFU exchange programs, confidential information must be shared to resolve difficulties or help students and host families understand issues. YFU students and parents should not expect that all YFU staff and volunteers, including professional counselors, will make promises of confidentiality.

All those participating in YFU programs should expect that YFU will share confidential information with discretion and in accordance with applicable data protection laws. Due to the nature of exchange programs, students will have information relating to their host family's personal life.

Students should treat such information with respect and confidentiality. Students should not publish any sensitive information about their host family and the relationship between them on the internet.

The student's right to privacy must also be respected. YFU considers it wrong to examine and/or confiscate a student's personal belongings, including passports or other identity documents. The student must respect the same rules regarding host family belongings. If the student's use of computers, cell phones or tablets makes it hard to fully engage with their host family, YFU may require the student to change or stop use of these devices to remain on program.

Student/Host Family Address, Telephone Number, Status on Program:

YFU does not allow the release of this information about a student or a host family to people not involved with YFU without the permission of the host family (or the natural parent/legal guardian(s) in the case of a student, unless the sending organization confirms that this is not necessary).

Specific policies for YFU USA:

The student must respect the same rules regarding host family belongings.

YFU USA works on a need-to-know basis. Information is shared appropriately with others who need to know such information to help participants. This means that information that is shared by the student or the host family with the YFU volunteer may be communicated to YFU USA staff if it is directly related to the student's exchange experience.

Communication With Natural Family And Home Country Friends

Policy:

Communication with the natural family and home country or other friends by phone or online (including all forms of social media) has an impact on an exchange student's learning experience. Therefore, YFU requires students to use such communication tools to develop positive relationships among students, natural parent/legal guardian(s), host families and other people in the host community.

If phone calls, either local or international, and internet usage are charged to the host family, students must pay all charges on time and before leaving their host country. The host family is not expected to pay bills for students.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Students must be conscious of how much communication they do with their natural family and friends at home during their stay in the US. It is important to stay in touch, but excessive contact may negatively affect the exchange experience and relationships with the host family. Students should be aware that time they spend writing, emailing, or calling home is time that they are not engaging with their host family. Too much contact may increase feelings of homesickness and make the adjustment to the host country more difficult. YFU recommends contact with the home country be on a weekly schedule. If a student is contacting his or her natural parents too often, YFU will ask both the student and the parents to limit such contact. If excessive contact continues, this can be grounds for Early Return.

Counseling

Specific policy for YFU USA:

YFU USA offers counseling services to students, if needed. These services include help from Local Coordinators and/or staff, and consultation, evaluation, and counseling by professional counselors arranged for by the YFU Support Services Manager (SSM). YFU USA does not provide on-going, therapeutic counseling.

Recommendations from a counselor for such on-going treatment for the student will be grounds for an Early Return recommendation.

Host families and students should always try to talk first with each other if there is a problem or misunderstanding.

If this does not resolve the situation, contact your Local Coordinator. If you are unable to reach a YFU volunteer, you should call the YFU USA emergency line: which is covered by YFU Support Staff 24/7: [1-800-424-3691](tel:1-800-424-3691).

Dangerous Activities

Policy:

YFU may withhold authorization for any activity if it is considered hazardous and unacceptable for the student to participate. The following activities are strictly not permitted: hang-gliding, parachute jumping, piloting a private plane, bungee jumping, and parasailing. Students should be aware that the list of dangerous activities varies from country to country, and that they will receive a list of any additional unacceptable activities in their host country.

The YFU Receiving Organization may permit some activities considered dangerous only if permission is given by the natural parent/legal guardian(s) in writing (unless the sending organization confirms that this is not necessary) and that the host parents allow the student to participate. This permission must satisfy the YFU Receiving Organization and must release YFU and the host family from all responsibility during the time the student is involved in that activity. The student and natural parent/legal guardian(s) alone are responsible for obtaining additional insurance if necessary.

Specific Policy for YFU USA:

YFU USA has very specific guidelines regarding activities that are not permitted for exchange students and are not covered by the insurance students receive.

The YFU Dangerous Activities Permission Form (with all required signatures) must be on file with the Support Services Department before any the activity begins. If the student is unable to get the form to their natural parents for their signatures, the natural parents can write a letter stating they “release Youth For Understanding USA and the host family from all responsibility during the time our son/daughter is engaged in that activity.”

Students are not permitted to drive any motorized vehicles, including all-terrain vehicles (ATV’s), automobiles, snowmobiles, e-scooters, trucks and motorized trail bikes, even on private property. Additionally, permission will not be granted under any circumstances for students to operate the following vehicles: go-carts, jet skis, mopeds or motorcycles. Students are permitted to ride as passengers on the aforementioned vehicles, provided they follow all the local laws and practice reasonable safety precautions. Lastly, permission will not be granted for students to participate in the following activities: bungee jumping, hang gliding, parachute jumping, parasailing, piloting a private plane, or wave-running.

Students are expected to take adequate safety precautions and must follow all local laws when participating in any kind of physical activity (i.e., helmets may be required when riding a standard bicycle; life jackets are required when boating or white-water rafting, etc.).

Students who engage in a dangerous activity without seeking permission or after permission is denied, will be considered for Early Return.

Disciplinary Procedures

YFU follows a disciplinary procedure to bring concerns to students’ attention, encouragement improvement, and to document and review student behavioral issues.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

All students are responsible for following host family, school, and YFU rules and regulations, as well as all federal, state, and local laws.

If a student violates host family, school, or YFU rules and regulations, a warning letter will be issued for the first offense. Repeat violations will result in the student being placed on probation. Serious offenses may result in immediate probation for the student, without receiving a warning first. **Probationary status means that the student will be considered for Involuntary Early Return** if their behavior does not improve or if they are reprimanded again for disregarding or breaking a host family, school or YFU rule.

A student who breaks any federal, state, or local law will be considered for Early Return. The decision will be made by YFU USA in consultation with the student’s home country YFU office, and law enforcement authorities, and will consider the type of offense.

Driving

Policy:

Exchange students are not permitted to drive cars, motorcycles, or other motorized vehicles. This policy applies even if the student has an international driving license or the host family thinks that the student is a responsible and careful driver. Students who break this policy will be considered for Early Return to their home country.

The driving restriction may be waived for those participating in post-secondary education programs, provided the student has the permission of their legal guardian (if required by the sending organization), the permission of their host family, a valid driver’s license, and proper insurance. Such decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Permission to use farm equipment, other off-road vehicles, trail bikes and mopeds is different in each country, and the decision about their use by students is left to the YFU Receiving Organization. If the YFU Receiving Organization allows the student to use one of the vehicles listed above, the natural parent/legal guardian(s) and/or the student should sign consent and accept liability, and the student is expected to take safety precautions, have sufficient insurance coverage, and obey the laws of their host country.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

YFU USA does not allow students to take driver’s education classes or obtain a driver’s license. Students who drive or engage in driver’s education classes will be considered for Early Return.



NOTE: YFU USA will permit students to use “Uber for Teens,” as long as the student is added to the host family’s Uber account (so the host family can fully monitor the ride if they want to), and as long as the student’s natural parents have provided written permission.

Drugs

Policy:

YFU students may not buy, sell, possess, or use drugs that are illegal in their home or host country. If they do, they will be considered for Early Return. Evidence of a student breaking this policy normally includes physical evidence, student admission of use or a reliable witness who has seen the student with or using illegal drugs.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Only drugs prescribed by a licensed medical professional or sold over the counter in stores are legal. Laws regarding the use or possession of marijuana in the US are still very strict, along with the use or possession of other illegal drugs. US states permitting recreational marijuana use restrict this to adults 21 and older. Federal law does not permit use of illegal drugs or marijuana. Such use is considered a violation of an exchange student's J-1 or F-1 visa status and can result in loss of the visa. In cases of suspected drug use or abuse by a student, YFU USA reserves the right to request a drug test at the student's own expense. Students found using drugs will be considered for Early Return.

Early Return Definition

Voluntary Early Return (VER):

A VER occurs when a student wants to return home from their host country earlier than planned. If required by the sending organization and if the natural parent/legal guardian(s) agree with this decision, then the natural parent/legal guardian(s) should provide their agreement in writing to the YFU Sending Organization prior to the return of the student.

Involuntary Early Return (IER):

An IER occurs when the YFU Receiving Organization decides, after discussion with the student, host family and YFU Sending Organization, based on stated guidelines, that a student should be removed from the YFU program and returned to their home country. If the student has broken the law of the receiving country or has seriously failed to follow the YFU Policies (e.g., is expelled from school), a student can be considered for an IER immediately. However, prior to this decision, YFU will try to provide the student with support to recognize the nature of their behavior and to work on improving that behavior. A student will receive a warning letter stating the specific expectations for improving their behavior and the support YFU can provide to help the student achieve those expectations. If the behavior persists, the student will receive a probation letter about the behavior and expectations for improvement in behavior. The letter will advise the student that if the expectations for improvement in behavior are not achieved, then an IER is the next step.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Early Return usually happens because the student cannot adjust to the host country, does not meet basic program selection requirements, has personal problems, breaks a major YFU policy, violates US law, or has problems at home with the natural family. All Early Returns must be approved by Youth For Understanding.

Electronics And Social Media

Specific policy for YFU USA:

The consequences of irresponsible "digital" behavior can be more public, more severe, and longer lasting than mistakes people make "offline." Students must follow all host family rules regarding electronic media use, or they will be placed on disciplinary procedure. Please refer to Appendix VII for detailed Computer Use and Internet Safety Guidelines and Social Networking Guidelines.

Sexting.

Depending on the circumstances, law enforcement may also become involved and criminal charges may be filed.

Harassing or Threatening Texts and Social Media Posts.

Students should be aware that such actions could result in criminal actions. Students should report to their YFU Local Coordinator or host parents if they are the target of harassing or threatening texts or phone calls.

Remember, anything shared digitally is not necessarily private. Even when using apps like Snapchat, someone can take a screenshot or capture the image with another camera. Be thoughtful in what you share, and do not engage in illegal activities or in re-sharing content that does not belong to you.

Employment

Policy:

Students in the YFU program are not permitted to work a full-time job during their stay. They should refer to the laws in their host country regarding other kinds of employment (e.g., part-time, casual or voluntary work).

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Students hosted in the United States are not allowed to work a full-time job. Students are allowed to work for up to 10 hours per week under the visa regulations permitting them to study and live in the US. This work must be informal, such as babysitting, grass cutting, snow shoveling, yard clean-up, etc., and must not interfere with school and host family activities. Students cannot work in any job that requires a social security number (such as working in a restaurant, retail store, etc.).

Host families should not expect their student to take on more chores/responsibilities than any other family member, or to work in a family business.

Extension of Stay

Policy:

Generally, YFU does not grant extensions of stay unless there is demonstrated evidence of a medical or special emergency requiring such an extension.

When a YFU Sending Organization requests an extension of stay in any circumstance other than a medical or special emergency, such an extension of stay must be agreed to by the YFU Receiving Organization. That agreement will consider a student's prior behavior during the program. The student must agree to continue to uphold the basic guidelines and aims of the YFU program during the period of extension. The student will, however, have no claim on YFU support during that period. The natural parent/legal guardian(s) are responsible for making all the necessary arrangements including, but not limited to, visa arrangements, extension of insurance and reservations for a return flight. In the case of Voluntary (VER) or Involuntary Early Returns (IER), an extension of stay is not permitted.

An exception to this policy may be made for those participating in post-secondary education programs who request to extend their stay in the host country. In this event, a student will not be considered "off program" until after the originally established departure deadline.

Internet

Policy:

YFU students are not allowed to download or upload copyrighted media files (music, video, images, and software) from or to non-official online stores that require a payment, or official websites that allow downloading even with approval of the copyright holder. This act is known as pirating and can result in legal consequences. YFU students must not provide their media files online for other users to download. The student, not YFU, its representatives or its host families, is responsible for any payment that may result from a student having broken any law in this way.

Legal Status

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Exchange students in the US are subject to all US national and local laws. If a student needs legal assistance in the US, YFU can assist in identifying a lawyer. The student and natural parents are responsible for all costs related to legal representation. Home country embassies or consulates cannot arrange free legal advice, provide bail, or get a student released from jail. Students who are 18 years old or who turn 18 while on program are considered adults under US law.

Marriage

Policy:

Married students are not permitted on the YFU program. If a student marries while participating in a YFU program or is discovered to have married prior to going on a YFU program, the student will be considered for Early Return. This policy also applies to students who are living together with a partner in a committed relationship.

Medical Treatment Of A Student (Including Emergencies)

Policy:

All YFU students must have insurance coverage for illness, medical emergencies, and hospitalization, and it must be acceptable to the YFU Receiving Organization. The student (not YFU, its representatives nor its host families) is responsible for any student medical bills regardless of who signs a hospital admission form. The student and natural parent/legal guardian(s) must recognize that YFU, its representatives and its host families are also not responsible for any negative results of emergency and/or other medical treatment.

Natural Disaster

Specific policy for YFU USA:

In the event of any natural disaster emergency, the host family should assist their exchange student in calling their natural parents as soon as possible to relieve concerns about safety or notify the parents of any arrangements that are being made to provide emergency service to the host family. YFU also asks that the host family contact their Local Coordinator, Support Services Manager, and YFU (1.866.4.YFU.USA) as soon as possible to report their status.

Off-Program

Policy:

If a student is absent without permission from the host family or other place to which YFU has assigned them, YFU may determine that this student has left the YFU program. The student and natural parent/legal guardian(s) must recognize that, in such case, YFU is released from all obligations, legal or otherwise, to the student and their natural parent/legal guardian(s) for their current or further well-being. In most countries, the validity of the student's visa is linked to being on program, which means that the visa would no longer be valid if the student is off program.

YFU will, if possible, work with the student to again accept YFU supervision without delay. However, if this cannot be done, dismissal from the YFU program is final. The student will then lose YFU support and their ticket to their home country will be issued for the earliest possible flight date.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

In the US, if a student goes Off Program, the student's US high school will be notified that they are no longer a YFU student, and the US Department of State will be notified of the termination of the student's YFU program participation. Airline tickets purchased by YFU must be used within 30 days of program termination or return airfare is forfeited by the student.

Orientations

Policy:

YFU requires students to attend all orientations throughout their exchange. These are not only opportunities to meet other YFU students, but most importantly, they offer students the chance to share feelings, expectations and concerns with YFU volunteers and staff. Orientations are designed to help students in their adaptation process. Attending orientations should be a priority for students and their host families.



The student must always keep the following documents and forms together:

- Passport
- DS-2019 Form
- I-797 receipt or SEVIS I-901 fee confirmation

Passport Or Visa

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Students will have their passports and visas with them when they arrive at their host families' homes. Students should make a record of their passport number and a copy of all the below documents, putting them in a safe place separate from their passport.

For identification purposes, students should always carry their YFU ID card with them. They only need to carry their passports when traveling. If a student loses their passport while in the US, the student should call the home country's consulate or embassy in the US. In such a case, the student might have to travel to the nearest consulate for an in-person application process. All related expenses are the student's responsibility.

If a student loses the DS-2019, contact your SSM immediately. The student will be financially responsible for securing a replacement. A sample copy, not for use, of the DS-2019 form can be found in Appendix III.

The student must always keep the following documents and forms together:

- Passport
- DS-2019 Form
- I-797 receipt or SEVIS I-901 fee confirmation

Each of these forms is useless without the others. The student may not travel outside the USA without obtaining Travel Permission from the YFU Office. **Should the student temporarily leave the US at any time during the stay, these forms must be taken with them.** The DS-2019 form acts as a re-entry permit during the period of the program indicated once it has been signed by a designated YFU USA staff member (a process outlined in the [Permission to Travel Policy](#)).

Personal Hygiene

Policy:

Besides the personal hygiene customs of the host family and culture, students should meet hygiene expectations in all areas: use of bathroom, bathing, grooming, and washing of clothes; and respect the dress codes of the host country, school and family.

Political Expression

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Views.

The political views students express are their own. Students are not official representatives of their country's government.

Involvement.

US visa rules prohibit an exchange student from promoting any US political candidates during the exchange. Since YFU is a non-political organization, students should not become involved in the political activities of the United States, no matter how strongly they feel about an issue or a candidate. A student's involvement may be misunderstood, resented, or disliked, and can result in conflicts or misunderstandings. Expressing opinions should be done with respect for others.

Pregnancy

Policy:

For medical, placement, and personal reasons, students found to be pregnant while on the YFU program will be returned home immediately after notification of the natural parent/legal guardian(s). Individual circumstances may justify exceptions to this policy; however, all students in this circumstance will be considered for Early Return to their home country.

YFU students who cause pregnancies while on program will be subject to the same policy.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

YFU encourages any pregnant student to inform her natural parents directly of the pregnancy.

Religion

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Exchange students and their host families frequently have very different ideas about religion. YFU encourages students to join their host families in all their activities, including religious services, unless the students' beliefs prohibit them from doing so. It is the student's choice, however, to attend or not to attend services.

YFU hopes that even if a student's religious beliefs make it impossible to attend services with the host family, the student will experience the many other social activities offered by most US churches, synagogues, and temples. These offer good opportunities for friendships and social activities. A student may ask the host family to help find a congregation of the student's faith if the student wishes to attend those services.

Replacement

Specific policy for YFU USA:

In the process of becoming acquainted, both host families and students may find they need to modify expectations and behavior. YFU Local Coordinators can assist the student and host family in working towards a resolution of any difficulties.

Sometimes, students must change host families. This usually happens because of very strong personality differences. Students are not allowed to change families just because they are having trouble adjusting to the USA, want to move to a different community or state, or want to live with a family from a different socioeconomic level. Nor are host family changes permitted because the host school does not offer enough classes or does not grant a diploma.

The decision to change families is made by YFU only after there has been discussion among the Support Services Manager, senior Support staff, Local Coordinator, student, and host family. YFU strongly believes that it is important to discuss with all participants any problems that may or may not lead to a replacement.

In most replacements, students will remain in the same area and school. Students will not be moved to a different state.

There are times when the procedures may not be followed due to circumstances unique to the student and host family. However, if a student moves themselves without the assistance of a YFU representative or without YFU support, this action will put the student out of visa status and Off-Program.

School

Attendance:

All YFU students on high school or post-secondary education programs are expected to regularly attend school, and each host country is encouraged to see that a normal course of schoolwork is maintained. Repeated non-attendance, which in some countries is against visa conditions, will result in possible Early Return to the student's home country.

Performance:

Allowing for an initial period of linguistic and/or academic adjustment, a student is expected to achieve an adequate school academic record. Within a reasonable period, poor motivation, underachievement (e.g., failing grades) or inappropriate behavior, in combination with poor adjustment in general, may be cause for Early Return consideration.

Formal Expulsion:

If a student is expelled from school, the student will be considered for Early Return to their home country.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

The student will be enrolled in the local high school arranged by a YFU representative. Students may attend parochial or private schools if tuition is waived or prior arrangements are made with the natural parents. Schools vary in providing free tuition, books, activities, and lunch programs.

Each student will be placed in an appropriate grade level based on their previous course work, English language ability, age, and school policies. YFU students must maintain an overall "C" average or better in each of their classes. No student hosted in the US should expect a US high school diploma. Individual schools decide this policy and YFU supports the school decision. YFU staff cannot change a school's policy.

Students are responsible for the process and expense of obtaining documents needed for home country academic credit requirements. Students are responsible for school fees.

Students asked by the school principal to leave a school based on poor grades or poor behavior will be dismissed from the YFU program. Most US schools will not provide a formal expulsion notice for legal reasons.

Smoking

Specific policy for YFU USA:

It is illegal for minors (under age 18) to purchase, possess and/or use tobacco products. and for anyone under age 21 to purchase, possess, use e-cigarettes (Vapes/Juul). Tobacco use puts you at risk for arrest, fines, jail, suspension from school and removal from extra-curricular school activities, including sports –as well as being asked to leave your host family and Early Return to your country.

Student Expenses

Policy:

Students are not responsible for meals and accommodation. Students are responsible for such expenses as school uniforms, testing fees, school laboratory fees, transportation, books, trips or expenses during trips, telephone calls or other personal expenses. They are also responsible for any property damage they cause.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Host families are expected to provide the student with three meals a day. This will include either a bag lunch or lunch money for the student to buy lunch at school. Whether a lunch or lunch money is provided is up to the host family. Students may elect to buy their own lunch.

Students and host families should not borrow from or lend money to one another. If money is lent in an emergency, students and/or host families should get a written receipt to make sure that there are no misunderstandings about repayment. YFU is not responsible for students' or host families' debts or loans.

Students may want to open a bank account. By using a W-8 BEN form (obtainable at a bank, online at irs.gov or from the YFU National Office), a student can open an individual account as a non-US citizen/resident in most areas without providing a social security number. The W-8 BEN form exempts foreign individuals from bank interest withholding rules. Students should not open a joint account with any host family member. Direct any questions to your Local Coordinator.

Student Travel

Policy:

YFU seeks to:

- Assure student safety to the greatest extent possible
- Be informed of a student's location
- Ensure students participate in host family and school activities.

Any travel having an impact on any of these factors requires written approval from YFU.

Each YFU organization will have specific travel approval procedures. The YFU National Organization in the host country has the final say in approving travel. Unauthorized travel may be cause for Early Return.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Students hosted in the US are not permitted to participate in trips sponsored by another exchange program, travel agent, community member, etc. The only trips that are permitted are those sponsored by YFU, trips with host parents or an authorized adult, school trips (which the school has officially approved), and/or trips sponsored by a religious or youth organization (if there is adult supervision). School should not be missed for travel unless prior permission is given by the school.

Any travel where the student will miss school, will need to contribute \$300 or more to the cost of the trip, will leave the US, or will be without the host family requires YFU USA approval prior to finalizing plans. **Travel where the student will be gone for more than 3 nights requires submittal of the Permission to Travel Form (submitted through your Host Family account) and may require YFU USA approval as well.** Failure to obtain approval from YFU USA may result in forfeiting any payments made if YFU denies travel permission. YFU USA has the final authority to grant or deny permission for travel. Unauthorized travel may result in a YFU determination that the student has taken him or herself Off Program.

Telephone And Computer Use

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Excessive phone or internet use, the posting of inappropriate comments/pictures on social networking sites, or visiting inappropriate sites, will result in warning or probation. If the behavior is not corrected, the student will be considered for Early Return.

Long-Distance and International Calls:

Students should make arrangements with their host families before making long-distance and international calls, especially regarding the duration and price of the call.

Visits From Natural Family and Home Country Friends

Policy:

Natural families and home country friends are strongly discouraged from visiting the exchange student during their exchange program, especially during the initial adjustment period. The visit interrupts continuity of the relationship with the host family and may lessen the exchange experience for the student and the host family. This interruption sometimes leads to adjustment difficulties so serious that YFU may consider Early Return of the student to their home country. Natural families considering such visits must contact the YFU organization in the sending country before any arrangements are made. Host families must not be expected to accommodate a student's visiting family members or friends regarding room, meals or transport.

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Natural family visits and visits from friends must be approved in advance by YFU USA and typically will only be approved if scheduled toward the end of your exchange. Host families are not authorized to give permission for natural family visits. Students must ask their Support Services Manager for approval.

YFU Identification Card

Specific policy for YFU USA:

Students will have a YFU identification card that they should always carry. Students may need the card to receive student discounts for entry to museums, movie theatres, or other places. The card also has important YFU phone numbers and addresses for emergencies.

Special Note:

All letters will be sent to the host family's permanent address as listed with YFU. If the host family will be at an address other than the permanent one on record, they should notify their Local Coordinator or the National Office so that all information is directed to the appropriate address. Federal regulations require YFU USA keep the US government informed of the physical residence of every student.

YFU and US Visa Requirements for Student Contact Information

Specific policy for YFU USA:

All YFU students are required to have a personal email address that is active in the US. Students are expected to check email regularly and are responsible for responding to YFU or LC messages promptly. YFU USA uses email to inform students of important news, activities, and J-1 visa updates. SEVIS collects this email for the student's visa record. Students who change their personal email before or after arrival in the US, are required to inform YFU USA (inbound@yfu.org). Most students will obtain a cell phone number in the US.

Appendix V: How Do You Do Things In Your Home?

The following questions will help you consider some of your family's most basic habits. The more you can communicate your habits to your new family member, the smoother your adjustment period will be. Be careful though not to overwhelm your new student with a list of "rules and regulations." Rather, use the questions below to identify some of your family's patterns and take the natural opportunities you will have with your student to share them.

Food

- When does your family eat meals? Is everyone expected to be there? Do family members need to make any meals for themselves
- Is snacking allowed? What types of food can you snack on (candy, fruit, leftovers, etc.)?
- Can you eat in the living room, bedroom, etc.?
- Is it important that your exchange student uses American table manners?
- Is it important that everyone eat basically the same thing (same menu) at the table?
- What appliances do you use in your home? Your student may not be familiar with American appliances.
- What's for lunch on a school day? Host families will provide 3 meals a day. Clearly define what the family will pay for at school and/or if food will be available at home for your student to bring lunch.

Dishes

- Who does the dishes, (or loads and unloads the dishwasher)?
- Are dirty dishes washed immediately, or is it acceptable to leave them in the sink or on the counter until a later time?
- What soap is used for dishes, in the dishwasher, etc.? You may need to explain that only dishwasher soap is used in the dishwasher.

Telephone

- Are there specific hours of use? For example, no calls after 9:00 PM.
- Are there limits on the duration of telephone calls?
- Who pays for long distance calls? Exchange students are responsible for their long distance charges. Explain the costs before your student makes a \$50 phone call to tell the natural parents s/he has arrived!
- Does your student need a cell phone? Help him/her find a stand-alone plan (not part of your family plan) or learn about the phone plan offered through YFU.
- Note: Answering machines and telephones differ from country to country. Make sure to explain the use of your answering machine, and telephone features like call waiting.

Pets

- Is your dog, cat, or other pet allowed inside or outside?
- Do you allow your pet(s) on the furniture or bed?
- Who feeds and cares for your pet(s)?
- May your pet eat the table scraps? May they eat from regular dinner plates?

TV, Music, etc.

- What is the tolerated noise level?
- Who decides which TV channel to watch? Can you change the channel if someone falls asleep or leaves the room, etc.
- Is there a specific time you want the TV or music turned off?
- Is the TV only allowed on weekends or after homework is completed?
- Do you have rules for playing video games, watching and streaming movies/shows, playing the Wii or using headphones/iPods?

Internet and Email

- What are your rules about computer/internet use? May your student use the family computer?
- If your student has a laptop, where should it be used and left when not in use?
- Does your family have limits on the use of e-mail or social networking? See YFU Policies in the Host Family Handbook.
- Is there an electronic curfew? (A time for ALL electronics to be charging in a public room for the night)
- If using your family computer - can computer programs be added/deleted? Are computer games permitted? May a student's friends use the family computer?
- Are there printer supplies (paper, ink, etc) that your student is expected to furnish?

Bathroom

- Who uses which one(s)?
- What is the most convenient time to use the bathroom for showering/ bathing and how much time is allowed?
- How long is too long?
- Do you expect everyone to shower everyday?
- Should the toilet seat and cover be up or down?
- Where should wet towels be put? How often are they washed?
- Should the door to the bathroom be open or closed when not in use?
- Exchange Students should buy their own personal hygiene products, such as deodorant, etc.

Laundry

- Where should dirty laundry be left - in a hamper, bathroom, bedroom floor, etc.?
- Does everyone do their own laundry, or does one person take responsibility?
- How often are sheets changed and who is responsible for changing them?

Bedroom

- Should the door be left closed or open?
- Do you knock before entering bedrooms or just open the door?
- Does the bed have to be made every day, never, or just on special occasions?
- Is it acceptable for your student to pile his or her clothes on the bed, chair, or floor? Should clothes be always put away?
- Who is responsible for cleaning the bedroom(s)?
- Is your student allowed to hang things on the wall with tacks, tape, or other materials?
- If your student is sharing a bedroom, how can everyone adapt to each other smoothly?
- What are the concerns about lights, music, keeping windows open or closed, etc? When do you get up and go to bed? How will each of you study and where?
- What are the rules surrounding friends (of both sexes) in the bedroom?

Odds and Ends

- Who uses the living room and for what purpose?
- Can you put your feet on the furniture?
- Are shoes to be worn in the house or taken off?
- Are lights to be turned off when leaving a room or left on?
- Are doors and windows to be kept shut, open, locked, or unlocked?
- Do you have curfew? What are the “house” rules? What are the consequences of breaking them?
- Are there assigned household chores, weekly, daily, rotating, etc.?
- Who brings in the mail and pays for stamps? Show your student how to address an envelope and where to place the stamp.
- Does the family attend a place of worship together? Every week or only on certain occasions? Should your student wear his or her best clothes to the place of worship?
- Are there designated “family times” daily or weekly? Explain when family members are encouraged to be together in common areas to play games, watch TV, etc.
- Is there a central family calendar?
- When are the family birthdays? What is your family’s culture around celebrating and gift giving?
- What should your student call you - Mom, Dad or by first name?
- What transportation is available - school bus, public bus, bicycle? Is it safe to walk around the area alone?
- What are the unwritten family rules? Think of iceberg and those rules below the water.

Appendix VI: Protecting Students And Families

YFU treats issues of student safety with the utmost importance. We are strongly committed to protecting students from sexual abuse and harassment by ensuring that students are safe within their host homes and communities. As a host family, it is essential to be aware and vigilant about potential causes and threats of abuse, and to understand how to address such situations. Below is important information on how to provide and maintain a secure, healthy environment for your exchange student. Note: All of our host families, volunteers, and students are trained on the topic of preventing, identifying, and reporting sexual abuse.

Avoid Misunderstandings.

Sometimes misunderstandings and miscommunication can lead to inappropriate and/or harmful behavior towards a student or family. Reduce the number of misunderstandings by openly discussing boundaries at the beginning of the student's exchange. Establish expectations for your student's behavior with adults in the greater community, but also within the host family. Don't avoid a topic of conversation just because it might be uncomfortable to talk about. Discussing rules and expectations at the beginning of the student's stay can help prevent future issues or miscommunication.

• Set Clear Family Boundaries:

Talk about appropriate behavior, physical interactions, and relationships between the exchange student and all members of the host family. Emphasize that crossing boundaries is not appropriate and can be harmful to the whole family. For example, a romantic or sexual relationship with a household member is inappropriate and must be reported to YFU USA.

• Don't Keep Secrets:

Let them know that as a host parent, you want to hear and talk about their experiences, whether they are positive or negative. Explain that it can be harmful and dangerous to keep secrets, particularly ones that make them feel uncomfortable. Also, it is not appropriate for an adult to ask them to keep a secret. Do not promise to keep secrets related to their safety or another child's safety.

• Show Respect:

Many exchange students come from cultures in which affection is displayed differently than in the US. If your student is uncomfortable with physical contact, respect their boundaries and avoid pressuring them to act differently. Let the student be the one to decide when he or she feels comfortable hugging, for example.

• Provide Privacy:

Adjusting to new surroundings, new rules, and new people can be overwhelming at times. It is important for your YFU student to have a private space in the home. Respect the privacy of students in their bedroom and bathroom. If you have questions about privacy vs. isolation, discuss with your Local Coordinator.

• Age of Consent:

The host family and the student must be aware and cautious of laws. In the United States, the Age of Consent is 18. Engaging in sexual activity with someone who has not reached the Age of Consent is illegal. This is an important topic to discuss with your student especially if they begin dating someone older or younger than they are. Please refer to aspe.hhs.gov for more information on state reporting requirements.

Recognize Warning Signs.

By recognizing behaviors that pave the way to abuse, we can prevent harm before it happens! Be mindful and think critically about the relationships your student has with adults in their life, both within the home and outside in the community. Remember, your exchange student should be treated as a member of the family, so you should exercise the same level of concern and caution as towards your own child. Trust your gut: if you feel that your student's relationship with an adult is inappropriate, express your concerns promptly to your YFU Local Coordinator and Support Services Manager. Be aware of the following signs that an adult may be crossing boundaries with your exchange student:

• Excessive E-communication:

Adults spending excessive time texting, calling, emailing, or messaging an exchange student on Instagram and other social media can be a warning sign.

• Special Relationship:

Adults spending extended time alone with an exchange student, behaving more like a peer than an authority figure, or giving gifts or money for no reason may be warning signs.

• Special Permissions:

Adults allowing an exchange student to break YFU or family rules is inappropriate.

• Denying Privacy:

Adults must respect the privacy of the student's bathroom or bedroom. Not respecting this privacy OR allowing the exchange student to enter an adult's bedroom or bathroom can be a warning sign.

• Inappropriate Sharing:

Adults turning to an exchange student for emotional or physical comfort by sharing personal or private information that would normally be shared with another adult is a warning sign.

Take Action.

The responsibility of keeping exchange students safe belongs to every adult in the community.

• Trust Your Gut:

As a host parent, you may sense that something is making your exchange student feel uncomfortable or observe that a relationship is heading down an inappropriate path. Even if there are no public accusations, it is important to trust your instincts if you feel something might be wrong. Inform your Local Coordinator or Support Services Manager as soon as you have a concern.

• Listen and Don't Judge:

Listen to your exchange student. If your exchange student feels uncomfortable, the feeling is legitimate and should not be ignored or denied. It is important not to dismiss any of the student's concerns, and to take the issue seriously.

• Support and Report:

It is not your responsibility to determine the truth or confront the alleged abuser. Your role is to inform your Local Coordinator or Support Services Manager of the student's report. Do not be a bystander—doing nothing to stop wrongdoing is an endorsement of wrongdoing.

• Report to YFU:

Contact your Local Coordinator and your Support Services Manager at 1.866.4.YFU.USA (1.866.493.8872). For events that occur outside of work hours (9 AM - 5 PM EST), call the YFU emergency hotline at 1.800.424.3691. If you are a mandatory reporter based on your profession, follow the requirements for that profession and report to YFU.

Extra Resources

National Human Trafficking Resource Center:

1.800.373.7888

Stop It Now!:

Receive free and confidential guidance on any issues or concerns you have. Contact through the hotline 1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368) or online at stopitnow.org.

Let's Talk:

If you are concerned about your own thoughts and feelings towards children, help is available. Visit the online help center at stopitnow.org.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:

Contact through the hotline (1.800.843.5678) or online at missingkids.com.

Appendix VII: Computer Use, Internet & Social Media Tips

Internet, and using “smart” devices are increasingly a part of everyday life. They are also a great way for exchange students to stay in touch with their friends and family in their home countries. YFU USA has found in past years that the overuse or misuse of technology can cause extreme tension in a family. It is important to set rules and boundaries for students regarding the use of technology in the home, and to enforce these rules to avoid conflicts. Remember, your exchange student should follow all rules that you have set for your own family, including Internet and computer usage. Below are the tips provided to students about social media and internet use.

General Computer and Internet Use

Excessive computer and phone use has previously had negative impacts on host family relationships.

It also inhibits the adjustment process. Students who are overly attached to communication back home often have a much harder time assimilating to life in the US. YFU students are not prohibited from communicating with their natural parents or friends during the exchange; however, this should be limited to an appropriate amount, and at no point should it negatively affect their relationships with their host family or friends in the US.

Host parents are encouraged to discuss safe ways to use the Internet with their students.

Many students will arrive with their own personal computer and/or smartphone.

The student is expected to follow host family rules on usage. Any rules should be clearly communicated to the student.

Use of the host family computer or access to the Internet is not a guarantee.

Students should be prepared for limited or no access in the host family home.

Students must always respect family time limits and the needs of others regarding computer and phone usage.

They should always ask permission before downloading programs or materials from the Internet.

Nothing on the internet is private,

including blogs, personal web pages, and social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, etc.). Everything posted on the internet can be viewed by any person at any time.

Be aware of the danger of internet predators.

Students must never communicate with strangers over the internet, not reveal personal information (name, phone number, address, etc.), and never agree to meet someone in person who they met over the Internet.

Students must not use violent, offensive, or sexually suggestive photos, screen names, or language on the internet.

These can result in the student being asked to leave their host family and/or school placement. In such cases, YFU may need to recommend an early return to the home country.

Students must never view, download, or send pictures or videos depicting nudity or sexual acts over the internet.

This is a serious crime in the US that can result in the student being arrested, charged with internet pornography, and sentenced to jail. Do not open or send such files.

Host parents or school personnel may choose to monitor their student’s Internet use but should always notify the student before checking computer activity.

Such monitoring is common and legal in the US (if the activity is on a host family or school computer), but it may be considered an invasion of privacy in many cultures.

A student’s own laptop computer is private property,

and YFU host families and representatives can ask a student to surrender the laptop if a condition of probation for overuse, however, no such persons are permitted to violate student privacy by examining personal records or correspondence.

Please don’t hesitate to contact the YFU office at 1.866.4.YFU.USA with questions or concerns regarding these policies. Additional resources for parents and teens on this topic can be found at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children website: ncmec.org.

Social Media Use

Online platforms are public.

Students are advised that the way they present themselves online can be seen by hundreds of people that they know and care about. Every time they post something, it is important to consider how they are representing themselves, their home country, natural family, YFU and host family. Every year a few students lose their host family because of what they have posted on Facebook or social media.

Connect with your host parents, host siblings and Local Coordinator on social media.

It's a great way to improve communication. Many YFU fields have closed group pages on Facebook. Be sure to join your group to share your experience with others and keep informed about what is happening in your area.

Limit social media activity with your home country.

While you are on exchange, change your social media settings and use English to communicate with your local American friends. Excessive communication with friends and family at home makes it harder to settle into the USA. If this becomes a problem for you, YFU and your host family will ask you to limit your time online.

Post pictures from your American life.

It's fun for others to see what you are doing during your exchange. Plus, you will have a nice photo album to look back on when your exchange year is complete!

Keep your profile private

viewable only by people you know! Do not share your phone number, address or email with everyone who has internet access! You can set these limitations in your privacy settings.

Delete inappropriate comments from friends.

It's OK to delete things you are embarrassed about or that you would not be proud of later in life. If a friend tags you, you can delete tags of yourself in any pictures that you don't want others to see. Even if your profile is private, your photos can be accessed publicly if you have been "tagged." Every year a few students lose their host family because of an inappropriate photo or post from their friends. Don't let this happen!

Don't harass or threaten others.

Spreading rumors or making fun of someone online is called cyber-bullying and can carry serious consequences. Don't complain about your host school, friends, or host family members on Facebook. Be sure to tell a host parent, teacher or YFU representative if you become the target of cyberbullying.

Join YFU groups and other groups associated with your interests.

This will help you learn about American culture. But don't join groups that might offend or embarrass you, your host family or your own parents.

Universities and employers are looking at social media pages.

All information and pictures that you post of yourself and your friends can become part of a school or job application later in life, and are part of your YFU application now!

YFU staff and volunteers will view your public social media accounts.

Any information contained in your Facebook page or posted about you by others that involves a violation of your host family's trust or YFU rules may result in disciplinary action up to and including being sent home.

Don't friend or "connect" with anyone you don't know personally.

Only accept friend requests from individuals you have met in person.

Appendix VIII: Orientations

YFU orientations help students and families develop communication, problem-solving, and cultural adjustment skills through hands-on activities. These sessions support everyone in adapting to new perspectives and household dynamics. Attendance by host families and siblings is strongly encouraged—and often required—as adjustment is a shared experience. Orientations also offer a chance to connect with other host families, share tips, and receive guidance from trained volunteers and staff.

There are four orientations scheduled throughout the exchange experience. Students are required to attend three of the four orientations. The first orientation is for host families to prepare for the exchange.

Host Family Pre-Arrival Orientation:

This required orientation prepares host families for student arrival. All families—including experienced hosts and YFU staff—must attend. It covers essential YFU policies and procedures and helps build community among host families.

Post-Arrival Orientation:

Typically held 4–6 weeks after arrival, this session helps students and families navigate culture shock, personal adjustment, and YFU policies. Parents attend a shorter session focused on communication and setting boundaries.

Mid-Year Orientation:

Held in the middle of the academic-year programs, this “check-in” supports students and families midway through the exchange. It addresses challenges like homesickness, school changes, or exam stress. Key topics include communication, goal setting, and problem-solving.

Re-Entry Orientation:

Held 4–6 weeks before departure, this session helps students reflect on their experience and prepare for returning home. Topics include reverse culture shock, saying goodbye, and departure logistics.

Appendix IX: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: My student lost their passport, what do we need to do and can YFU help us?

A:

The student needs to contact their home country consulate office and get instructions on how to replace the passport. Do this as soon as possible as this process can take a long time. Also, inform YFU immediately so that YFU can replace the DS-2019 travel document if that was also lost.

Additional Tip: When your student arrives in country, it is a good idea to make a photocopy of the student's passport. Also, remind students to keep their passports in a safe place. Students do not need to carry their passports around with them for identification; most schools issue a student ID that can serve as identification.

Q: What do we do if student medical bills are sent to our home?

A:

Inform YFU (Support Services Manager, via email) of the medical provider and the date of service. Forward medical bills to:

YFU USA

3995 Fashion Square Blvd
Suite 2
Saginaw, MI 48603

Q: Who registers the student for school?

A:

Host families register students for school. Your Community Manager has already talked with the school and your exchange student has permission to attend a designated school. Once your student arrives, make an appointment with the guidance counselor to register your student. During this time, the student may need to choose classes. Keep in mind that some schools have limited options for class selection and schools are not required to meet the student's preferences for classes.

Q: We are traveling for a weekend without our student and have found someone to care for them, do we need to inform YFU of these arrangements?

A:

Yes, let your Local Coordinator and/or Support Services Manager know if your student will be staying with another family (with a responsible adult who is at least 21- years-old) while you are away. See the travel policy for additional details. Students are allowed to stay with another family (from school and/or within the community) for up to five nights.

If you (host parents) will be away from home and cannot care for your student for longer than five nights, additional procedures are followed. If the student is staying in the host family home with a responsible adult (who is not part of the household and must be at least 21-years-old), the adult caring for the student must be added to your host family application and the adult will need to complete the YFU Criminal Background Check (CBC) process. If the student is staying with another family outside of your home for more than six nights, the family must complete a HF application and be fully vetted. This includes completing the HF application, CBC process, references, and a YFU orientation.

Q: How do you activate the SIM card phone plan?

A:

When you receive the SIM card information packet, there are instructions on how to set up an account. The student can use their own credit card to pay the monthly fee and activate the SIM card.

Appendix X: Host Family Agreement

Our family has volunteered to host a student with Youth For Understanding USA (YFU USA), so that, by sharing our lives with an international visitor, I/we may gain exposure to new ideas and perspectives and promote international friendship.

If selected to host a YFU student our family agrees to:

1.	Read the YFU Host Family Handbook.
2.	Participate in the required in-person Pre-Arrival Orientation prior to the student's arrival, as provided by our Field area; or complete the required on-line Pre-Arrival Orientation. Where schedules permit, YFU highly recommends combining both in-person and on-line orientations for excellent preparation to hosting.
3.	Facilitate the attendance of our YFU student at all YFU-required orientation meetings (post-arrival, mid-year and re- entry) and show support for our student by having at least one parent attend the parent sessions, if offered by our Field area during the program year. YFU strongly advises that a host parent attend orientation parent sessions during the program to benefit from YFU content for host families.
4.	Welcome our YFU student as a member of our family and assist in the student's adaptation to our family as well as to U.S. life and culture.
5.	Provide a home environment for our YFU student, to include a bed (not inflatable or convertible) in a room with a door for privacy and an exit window or door to the outside for fire safety, a study area, and designated storage space for personal belongings.
6.	Provide three nutritious meals per day, including family meals taken outside the home and school lunches.
7.	Ensure our YFU student a bedroom shared with no more than one sibling who is of the same sex and between the ages of 10 and 22. Other situations must be approved by YFU and agreed to by the student and natural parents in advance.
8.	Help our YFU student meet other Americans through introductions to friends, neighbors and classmates, and by encouraging our student to join clubs or pursue activities which will foster friendships with other teens.

9.	Ensure transportation to school for our YFU student and help to arrange necessary transportation for our YFU student for extracurricular activities after school or in the evenings, by driving the student or by providing access to a bicycle, a bus, helping to arrange carpools, rides with friends, etc.
10.	Ensure our YFU student access to a telephone for social purposes, for reasonable (weekly) contact with natural parents and YFU representatives, as well as for emergencies, through full access to our landline or by helping the student obtain a cell phone.
11.	Provide our YFU student with reasonable access to the internet for the purpose of e-mailing natural parents. Internet access may be provided from our home, a smart phone or a community resource such as a school or public library.
12.	Not enter any non-cancelable or term contracts (e.g., cell phone, health club, lessons) on behalf of the YFU student. Doing so will be at our own risk and YFU is not liable for any costs of such contracts should the student leave the program or our home prior to the end of any contract term.
13.	Help our YFU student to become familiar with our community and its resources (e.g., interesting sights, location of and how to use the library and recreation facilities, location and layout of school building, shopping areas).
14.	Accept and expect, at minimum, telephone, in-person, or email support contact from a YFU representative with the YFU student and a parent family member once per month. At least two of these contacts will be meetings in our home, one of which will occur within 60 days of our student's arrival. I/We will be flexible in facilitating the scheduling of the required monthly contact with our YFU student and our family. I/We understand that contact through messaging services, including text messaging, What's App, or Facebook alone does not meet the monthly contact requirement.
15.	Expect our YFU student to follow YFU policies (link below) and to obey all local laws. I/We will immediately report any violation of YFU policy or the law to our YFU Local Coordinator.

16.	Work with our YFU student through open communication to solve problems, and to resolve difficulties and misunderstandings. If these remain unresolved, our family will contact our YFU Local Coordinator. I/we will also contact YFU if issues arise in our family's and/or student's adjustment, in our student's school performance, or if our family must withdraw from the program at any point after a student placement is confirmed for us. If we find it necessary to ask that that student be removed from our home, we will give YFU not less than 3 weeks' notice in order that YFU may identify, screen and orient a new family for our student.
17.	Notify YFU immediately of any emergency involving our YFU student, our family or the student's natural family, of any change in our household composition (adults moving in or out), parent marital status, change in our contact information (telephone numbers and e-mail addresses), a change in our place of residence, financial or employment status, or of criminal prosecution of a family member.
18.	Provide responsible adult supervision (minimum age 21)at home for our YFU student should we be away overnight.
19.	That YFU retains the authority to render any and all final decisions related to the student's welfare and program participation. In particular, I/we will adhere to the YFU Student Travel Permission and Dangerous Activities Permission policies, as these specifically protect my family from legal liability. I/We are not the legal guardians of the YFU student placed in our home, and should not sign any documents or releases as the legal guardian, with the exception of school- related permission forms.

20.	Seek medical care for our YFU student should he/ she become ill or be involved in an accident, and to provide transportation to providers of such care. We are legally empowered by the student medical release to arrange medical care for our student due to illness or accident. I/We will notify YFU immediately of any accident, hospitalization or serious illness. All students carry illness and accident insurance for the duration of the program. I/we understand that the insurance does not provide coverage for preventative care, preexisting conditions, immunizations or required physicals for school or school sports, non- accident-related dental care, routine eye exams, glasses, or contact lenses; I/we will contact the YFU representative to arrange for natural family consent and payment for such expenses.
21.	Respect the privacy of YFU students, host families, volunteers and staff by using information appropriately and preventing the misuse of personal information, including on social media sites.
22.	Follow and accept rules the host high school may have about enrolling exchange students which limit the grade level(s)in which a student can be placed, which prohibit exchange students from obtaining a diploma and/or which govern participation in extra-curricular activities. I/we will expect our student to follow school rules while residing in our home. I/ We certify that no member of our household has had contact with a coach regarding the hosting of an exchange student with particular athletic ability. I/ We agree to share copies of any school documents pertaining to the YFU student with the YFU Local Coordinator or other YFU staff.
23.	Review a copy of the U.S. Department of State's "Criteria for Exchange—Visitor Teenager Programs."

I/We have read and understand the above guidelines and agree to follow them throughout our participation as a YFU host family. I/We hereby certify that all of the information provided in the YFU Host Family Application, including attachments, is true, accurate, and complete to the best of my/our knowledge.

Appendix XI: YFU USA Acronym List

APP	Application
CM	Community Manager
ELTiS	English Language Test for International Students
HF	Host Family
IER	Involuntary Early Return
IS	International Student
J-1	Student Visa for International Students
LC	Local Coordinator
MYO	Mid-Year Orientation
NF	Natural Father
NM	Natural Mother
NP	Natural Parents

PAO	Post-Arrival Orientation
PrAO	Pre-Arrival Orientation
PDO	Pre-Departure Orientation
REO	Re-Entry Orientation
RS	Registration Specialist
SA	Study Abroad
SAF	School Acceptance Form
SEE Visit	Student Environment Evaluation Visit
SSM	Support Services Manager
STD	Student
VER	Voluntary Early Return
VOL	Volunteer
YFU	Youth For Understanding