



# ***PASSPORT TO THE USA***

## **STUDENT HANDBOOK**



**YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING**  
**Intercultural Exchange Programs**

Visit us at [yfuusa.org](https://yfuusa.org)

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## Mission Statement

At Youth For Understanding (YFU), we aim to foster inter-cultural 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

The present edition of this handbook is based on work previously done by Judith Blohm. We greatly appreciate the revisions and additions contributed by YFU staff and volunteers. Many thanks to all the professional and amateur photographers who have provided pictures for publication in this and previous editions. Numerous YFU staff, alumni, and volunteers contributed their time, energy, and expertise to making this handbook possible.

## Using This Handbook

This handbook is a guide to your YFU exchange year – read it carefully! We hope that it will be a helpful resource for you as you prepare for your US cultural and academic exchange experience, so you can feel more relaxed. Additionally, this handbook provides information about YFU policies and procedures in the United States. If you have read the materials from your YFU National Office, or attended an orientation meeting, then you may already know some of this information. This handbook should answer questions you may have and direct you to the right sources of information for the questions it does not answer.



**Make sure to bring this book with you to the US – you will need it. Safe travels, and we look forward to meeting you in the US!**

## 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



If the English in the handbook is difficult to understand, ask your Local Coordinator or your host family to help you. They will be happy to explain the parts that you do not understand.

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# The YFU International Family

This year you are joining a family with more than 260,000 former YFU students and as many host families all over the world. The YFU program began in 1951 with a small group of German teenagers going to the US. Today, approximately 4,000 international students exchange amongst YFU's 70 partner country offices each year. About 250 American teenagers study abroad with YFU, and YFU USA receives 400-450 students annually.



## Introduction

The YFU experience of living in another country is a very special opportunity. Your life as an exchange student will be both interesting and educational—sometimes fun and sometimes frustrating.

You will:

- Be dependent on your host family for the year;
- Act and live independently from your natural family
- Meet new and interesting people
- Learn a lot about one area of the US; and
- Get the chance to use and practice English in a total immersion environment.

This handbook provides some suggestions for how to approach and prepare for the exchange experience while you are at home and after you arrive in the US.

## Your Learning Experience

Exchange students learn a great deal from their experience of living abroad. Some growth is personal and comes in the form of maturity and the ability to think for oneself.

### Think of what you would be doing if you stayed home instead of being an exchange student.

- How much would you change in that period?
- How many new friends would you make?
- How much more responsibility would you gain in your family?
- How much would you learn about yourself?

### Now consider the big step you are taking in becoming an exchange student.

**You are:**

- Leaving familiar places and people
- Finding new ways to make friends or do things and develop new ways of expressing yourself
- Sharing yourself and your country with people who may never have known someone of your nationality.

## Your Growth in the Exchange Experience

As an exchange student, you will be challenged to think about your own country and ideas. You will meet many new people, and experience situations that your friends at home will not. You may improve your ability to solve problems by yourself and learn how to get along in an unfamiliar place.

From all your experiences, you will surely gain confidence in yourself. You may find that you can do things you never thought you could do. YFU gives you an opportunity to become a citizen of the world, as well as of your own country.



**Expect to change, grow, and enjoy your new experience.**

## Having a Successful Exchange Experience

### Give. Learn. Be patient

The success of your exchange experience depends mostly on you. The more you give of yourself to your new family, school, and community, the more you will receive in return. Your host family has opened their home and wants to accept you as a son or daughter. You, in turn, have a responsibility to treat your new family with the same respect and kindness you give your natural family. Learn their ways of doing things and discover your place in the family. Be as patient with them as you would like them to be with you.

### Talk about problems

When you face small problems or conflicts that arise in any family, talk with your host family. Express your feelings and really listen to what family members tell you.

### Say ‘Thank you’

Don’t be afraid to express your appreciation to your host family. Saying ‘thank you’ shows you have enjoyed something and appreciate what they have done for you. It makes your family feel good and want to share more with you.

**! Remember, your host family is volunteering and does not receive any financial compensation.**

### Responsibility and Commitment

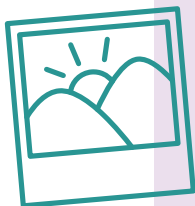
Show people that you are interested in doing things with them. Show them that you are enjoying their company and appreciate your stay. Participate in all types of school and family activities. Be friendly and communicate. Take the responsibility for being a good exchange student.

### Understanding Your Country First

You may be asked many questions about your country, its history, recent politics, current events, and social changes. You should be prepared to answer these questions.

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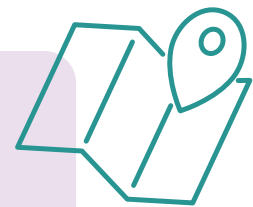
Being an exchange student is not easy at all. Do not think everything is going to be as you expected. Be patient, kind, and nice to your friends and especially your family— they are the most important part of the experience.



### Before you leave home

Read newspapers and learn what others may be hearing about your country. You may wish to bring a recent edition of your newspaper or a weekly news magazine to share with your host family and friends.

Bring some photos, books, maps, and other items along to share your country with your family, school, and community.



## Understanding the US

### In your own country, learn all you can about the US before your arrival.

You will learn most things while you are here, but a basic understanding of the size and geography of the US will give you something to talk about with your family when you first arrive. It is also good to know what your own newspaper and media are saying about the US. Americans will ask you what the people in your country know and think of the US. Can you answer their questions?

### In the US.

While you are in the US, you will have many opportunities to learn about this country. Not only will you learn from your family and friends, but you will also see documentaries, watch television and read the news. You will be a student of American culture.

## Realistic Expectations

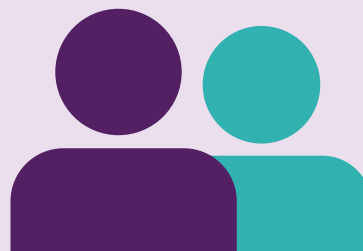
The biggest challenge many exchange students face is coping with the difference between what they expected and what living in the US is really like. Often YFU hears students say, “It’s not what I expected,” “I want to live in a big city,” “I want to travel and see the US,” “I’m bored and have nothing to do—I want to change families,” or “I thought I’d make American friends immediately.” These students did not understand the YFU program, or they did not have realistic expectations.

Sometimes, host families also need to change what they expect. YFU often hears these comments from host families: “Our student is not like what we read in the student’s introduction,” “We thought she would be our child’s best friend,” “We expected our student to speak perfect English,” or “We were sure the student would fit into our family right away.”

The hardest time for both students and families is the first few months together. Why? Because both students and host families “expected” something different from what actually happened. After some time together, both families and students start to understand each other and what living together and sharing ideas will be like. Then the family living experience begins to be more comfortable for everyone. So be patient, initiate conversations with your host family, and be positive.

### Remember, as a student, it is your responsibility to:

- Make new friends and participating in new activities;
- Change your habits if necessary to live successfully with your host family;
- Follow the customs of the US and your host family;
- Adjust your lifestyle based partly on your host family’s economic level and the region and town of the US in which you are placed;
- Follow the laws of the US, the policies and procedures of YFU, the rules of your host family, and the rules of your high school;
- Study and work hard for good grades; and
- Learn a lot, have fun, and experience changes in yourself through your exchange experience.



The letter from Paola, an exchange student, on the following page expresses these ideas well and explains what not to expect during your exchange.

# Paola's Letter

## Dear New Exchange Student,

Before you begin to form opinions about what I'm going to say, I want to tell you that I'm not sorry that I was an exchange student. I think I made a good decision when I sent my application to Youth For Understanding.

What I regret about going to another country is not being prepared. Sure, I read all about the weather and the geography and the food. I had all the right clothes and things. But these things were not as important as the ideas I had in my head. I think it is very important to be thinking correctly about your experience in the US before you go.

Maybe some of my ideas will help you.

### 1. Be realistic

The US may seem like a dream to you. It may be rich people, big cities, beaches, and nightclubs, just like in the movies. Don't forget that you are going to another country to live with another family. It is not a dream world. You will have to make new friends and find out how to be a member of a family that does things differently from your family. You will not be a guest with nothing to do but sit back and relax. You will have to be an active family member. It's not easy!

### 2. Think about all the possibilities

This is hard to do because you are so excited, but you should try. Most Americans don't live in big cities. Chances are that you will live in a small rural town or in a suburban area. There may not be a lot of city things for you to do. But you will find out that there are other things—other types of social gatherings, recreation, and shopping. Your family will probably not be rich. Most American host families are middle class economically. They may not do much traveling or have expensive hobbies. But you will learn to enjoy what the family does. Try to be prepared to accept the style of living you find and learn all you can about that way of life!

### 3. Don't have a wild imagination about how it's going to be

Sure, you have ideas from TV and other exchange students, but the US is a huge country with great regional differences. There are truly a million possible family situations you may be in. Try not to expect one special situation. And remember, YFU is not a travel program. It is a family living program. You'll be lucky to travel in your own region, but it is very unusual for YFU students to see much of this huge country. Don't expect to travel.

Also don't expect that you can change families to try to get a "better" one. In selecting your host family, YFU has placed you in a family that is appropriate for hosting you. Both you and your family will learn to get along with each other, but it's up to you to fit into the family. They are not going to change their lifestyle for you.

### 4. Be ready to be active

You will need to do things with your family and in your community. Your host family will help you find ways to make friends but you will have to do the work. You will enjoy your stay in the US much more if you join clubs at school or other organizations. It is an American custom to be active, so don't sit and wait! These are some ideas that will help you expect what you will really find in the US. Don't be discouraged! Go with an open mind and see!

**I hope you have a wonderful stay, just like I did.**

Sincerely,

**Paola**



## Preparing for the US Cultural Experience

### Your Cultural Experience

Many students come to the US with all the right clothes, documents, and amount of money. But they have not prepared for their trip in the most important way—that is, they have not examined their attitudes and understanding of themselves, their community, and their country.

### We Are All Products of Our Own Culture

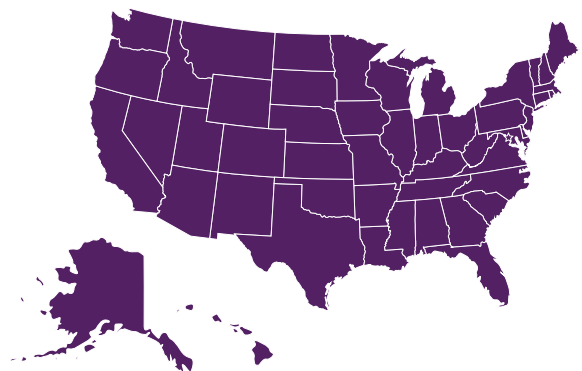
#### Defining culture

One definition of culture is the values, attitudes, beliefs, and ideas that a group of people holds in common. Culture is not cathedrals in France, tulips in the Netherlands, Aztec ruins in Mexico, or temples in Japan. Rather, these are reflections of the values of the people who built them or have them. They show something about the beliefs or ideas of the people of that country.

### A cultural model

One way to visualize culture is through the iceberg analogy developed by Edward T. Hall. Through this analogy, we see that the visible elements of culture the 10% of the iceberg that is above water can be observed and easily understood. These are things such as food, dress and technology and behaviors like shaking hands, holding the door for someone or greeting a stranger. As with the iceberg, below the surface are aspects of culture that cannot be observed, such as beliefs, attitudes and values. These are the things that drive a group's behavior. Examples are a group's notion of modesty and approaches to problem solving. Just like the iceberg, where 90% of its mass cannot be seen. You can only see these elements of culture as they are expressed in behavior.

Being immersed in American culture and even your host family's home culture will allow you to recognize and understand those beliefs and values that are not immediately evident. It will require thoughtful reflection on your part.



## Culture Shock

### Adjustment

If you have difficulty adjusting to life in the US, it may be because of a difference in lifestyle, and a conflict between the ideas and values you find in the US and your own ideas and values. If you recognize this, you will be able to understand why you sometimes find it hard to live in another culture.

When you live in a new culture, many of the things you are accustomed to are gone. Even the simplest things require thought before you're sure how to do them. For example, perhaps in your culture you bow to greet people or embrace and kiss people on the cheek. In the US, you may shake hands, but mostly you will just say "hello." There are hundreds and hundreds of little things, such as greeting people, that vary by country.

When you first live in a new culture, it is fun to learn new ways of doing things. Sometimes, however, you get tired of having to remember how to do so many things differently. You may feel that everything is different; nothing seems familiar or comfortable to you. This is very common. Almost everyone who lives in a new culture feels this way sometimes. It is called "culture shock."

### Culture shock means that your mind is tired of having to think about everything.

You are tired of having to analyze and understand all the new things you see. If you get very tired, your mind stops trying to understand all these new behaviors, and you may withdraw. Instead of trying to adjust to the new society, you may become quiet and prefer to think of home, where you felt more comfortable. You may even feel confused or angry or wonder if you can get along in such a strange place.

If you experience culture shock, you should not think that you have failed and cannot be a good exchange student. You should talk about it or write down how you feel. Your host family and Local Coordinator know about culture shock and may be able to help you understand your feelings. If you write down what is bothering you in a journal, you can help yourself, too.

People all over the world react to culture shock in some of the same ways. Usually, they reject the new country and decide that it is not as good as their own.

### One common reaction is to feel that everyone is making life difficult for you.

Have you ever seen tourists in your country? One of the most common complaints made by "foreigners" in another country is about what they see as "inefficiency" in the host society. That is, the slightest delay or need to go somewhere else to buy something makes them angry. Frequently, tourists will not spend time with the people of the country they came to visit. They stay very close to others of their own nationality. These are very common examples of how people react to culture shock.

### How will you know if you have culture shock?

Here is a list of some of the common indications:

- A feeling of helplessness and a desire to depend on other people of your own nationality;
- Anger with delays and other minor frustrations that are not very important;
- Not wanting to learn more of the language of the country;
- Too much fear of being cheated, robbed, or injured;
- Fear of going to new places and doing new things;
- Homesickness—wanting to be back home; and
- Physical symptoms such as too much or too little sleep, irregular bowel movements, stomach aches, headaches, frequent crying.

### What can you do if you think you have culture shock?

- Remember that most foreign visitors have these feelings. Do not worry that you are "the only one" who feels this way.
- Try to decide what particular things are bothering you, no matter how small or unimportant.
- Plan small tasks each day that will help you meet people and accomplish something—like buying something in a different store, talking to someone new, accepting an invitation to go somewhere. And do each task!
- Relax, take a deep breath, and be glad you have the opportunity to live in a country different from your own.

## Adjustment

As you improve your English and begin to get around by yourself, you will feel more comfortable in your new home, school, and community. You are likely to be more interested in the people of your host country and will even be able to laugh at the little things that once bothered you. Now you are on your way to adjusting to life in the US.

Remember that most exchange students go through difficult periods. It is just a step on the way to adjusting to a new lifestyle. Try not to send your natural parents unhappy emails. You may find that what is bothering you one day may be gone in the next day or two. But your family will worry and feel they need to call you or call YFU to ask about you. Try not to overreact to small difficulties. They will usually pass quickly.

During your exchange, your local volunteers and regional YFU staff will organize orientation programs and other activities to help your adjustment. It is required to attend all YFU orientations.

Over time you will be surprised about how well you will adjust. With time, you will feel comfortable with daily life and experience fewer anxious moments. Eventually, you will not only accept the food, habits, and customs, but begin to enjoy some of them.

## The Adjustment Cycle

As you adjust to your new surroundings you will realize that though the environment does not change, your attitude toward it does. You will begin to understand why Americans live as they do, allowing you to communicate better. Initial challenges will disappear as you begin to understand and adjust to this new way of life.

The adjustment process follows a fairly predictable cycle. You may only experience some of these stages. Each stage of this cycle is normal and healthy.

**The graph above represents the five basic stages of the adjustment cycle**

### Stage 1:

**Isn't that interesting?** Shortly after your arrival, you will find many things exciting since they are new and different from what you are used to.

### Stage 2:

**The thrill is gone.** At this stage, routine begins to set in, you become accustomed to your environment; and everything is not so fascinating anymore.

### Stage 3:

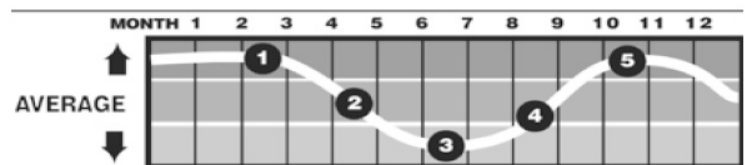
**How can they live like that?** At this stage, several weeks or months have gone by, and you may be experiencing homesickness. If a holiday that you are unfamiliar with is approaching, you may feel like an outsider. Maybe you reject the American culture and believe that the way things are done in your country is better. As a result, you isolate yourself from the host culture, look for friends who have the same nationality as you, and have the "I'm tired of trying" mentality. This is normal and okay; it means you are experiencing "culture shock" and culture fatigue.

### Stage 4:

**Let's get on with it!** You have decided that there are only a few months left and will make the best of the time left. Your home culture's values, attitudes, beliefs, and ideas are no longer threatened by the new culture.

### Stage 5:

**I feel at home.** The final stage is achieved when you can completely function in the US as you would in your home country. This means you begin to act and react like an American would. You even learn to behave in the same way that you found distracting or disturbing in Stage 3. You may not reach the final stage, and this stage is not always a 100 percent positive stage, since some people have been known to try too hard to adapt and uncomfortable situations occur as a result.



# Language Learning in the US

## Language Difficulties When You First Arrive

What can you do to feel at home in the US as quickly as possible?

### Focus on your English-speaking skills.

When you can speak with people, you can get to know them. You can ask why they do things. You can explain how you do things differently. You can express your happiness and your frustrations. You can ask for help.

You may be surprised when you arrive in the US that your English is not as good as you thought it was. You may find it very easy to read and understand this book.

### *Then why is it so difficult to understand people and to speak?*

There are several reasons why this can happen. It is easier to learn to read, answer questions in a textbook, or memorize a dialogue than it is to talk with someone who uses words you do not understand and speaks too fast. It is probably easier for you to understand people from your country who speak English as a second language rather than native speakers. The problem may be that you have not spent time speaking English in the same everyday manner that you speak your own language. And that is a very different situation than being in a language class.

### Don't worry.

**Americans are more interested in learning about you than they are in whether you speak perfect English.**

Don't let your self-consciousness keep you from speaking with others.



### No one expects you to speak perfect English.

Conversations are the best way to get to know others, and the more you speak English, the sooner you will become more comfortable and confident.

### You may also be hearing “American English” for the first time.

If you studied “British English,” you may find that some expressions, pronunciations, and sentence patterns are different in the US. Will learning American English ruin your British English? You will probably develop a different accent and change some of your expressions. But if you become fluent in American English, you can change the few expressions necessary to get along in your English classes when you return home. It is nothing to worry about.

You may find that you get very tired of listening to English all the time. This is normal. It happens because you must listen very carefully to understand. You cannot relax while listening, which you can do in your own language. It is difficult and tiring. You will need to rest, listen to some music, or read for a while to relax.



Be really patient and strong even when you don't understand English and feel bad. Try to participate in the conversation! Time passes very fast, so don't waste any time.

-YFU student from Japan

## How Can You Help Yourself

**You are in the perfect situation to learn English**—you are surrounded by English speakers who probably do not speak your own language. To take advantage of this situation, plan for how you will learn. Here are some points to keep in mind:

<p><b>Focus</b> on everyday conversation.</p>	<p><b>Don't be afraid</b> or embarrassed to make mistakes. It's normal to make mistakes when learning a new language. When you learned your native language, you made mistakes, but you learned to correct them by listening to your parents and others.</p>	<p><b>Listen</b> to everything around you. Listen to radio and TV news and talk programs. Listen especially carefully when someone is speaking to you.</p>
<p><b>Speak up</b> even if you are unsure how to say something <b>the only way to learn is to practice</b>. One of the best pieces of advice we can give to you is to sign up for after-school activities and get involved as much as possible in your community.</p>	<p><b>Ask</b> people to “speak slower” or “repeat” what they have said if you do not understand. You will be surprised how fast you begin to recognize whole sentences and questions.</p>	<p><b>List</b> the expressions and words that are new and useful. Try to use them.</p>
<p><b>Carry</b> a pocket dictionary with you to use when you cannot remember a word or do not know one. (Try to buy a two language dictionary before you leave your country.)</p>	<p><b>Limit</b> use of electronic pocket translators. If you bring one, plan to only use it for the first month in the US or else you might depend on it so much that it actually takes longer to learn English.</p>	<p><b>Record</b> yourself while you talk with a host family member or friend. Later, listen to it to hear how you might improve.</p>
<p><b>Watch</b> TV programs that teach young people English, such as “Sesame Street” or the “Reading Rainbow.” Young children themselves will usually enjoy helping you practice conversation.</p>	<p><b>Read</b> out loud to younger host siblings or even your host parents to improve your pronunciation and help grow your vocabulary.</p>	<p><b>Relax</b> enjoy, and do not take yourself too seriously. Laugh at yourself and help people laugh with you when you make mistakes. Some of your embarrassing moments with English will be your funniest stories when you return home!</p>

## Who Can Help You

You will find that many people around you will help you. If you ask them to do so, your host family and friends will correct your English and help you say what you want to say. You may want to choose one special person—a “language helper”—who will help you regularly with your English. It could be a member of your host family, a friend, or one of your teachers. Choose a person you like and respect. It must be someone who will correct you when you make an error and who will help you practice.

## What You Can Do with A Language Helper

First, your language helper needs to talk to you to find out how much you already know. Then together you should plan what you need to learn. It is best to learn the everyday sentences, questions, and answers that you need to use. Keep your lessons very simple.

### Follow these easy steps:

- Tell your helper what you want to learn, such as how to ask where something is, or how to answer questions about liking or disliking something, such as a movie or a class at school.
- Have your helper write down several sentences, including questions about that topic.
- Listen as your helper says the dialogue or sentences.
- Repeat what your helper has said.
- Listen again. Repeat again.
- Try to use the sentences in a short conversation.
- Write down, read, or record the sentences that your helper gave. Keep them to study on your own.



### Remember that you want to learn the spoken language.

The more often you practice listening and answering, the faster you will speak comfortably and fluently.

You will also hear many expressions and “slang” words that you do not know. Ask your friends or language helper what they mean and when and where you can say them.

Make time to practice your English every day. Visit [ESLGold.com](https://www.eslgold.com) for online language resources and activities.

If your language helper is willing to help you every day, that would be wonderful. Maybe in exchange you can teach your helper your own language!

If your language development needs further help, instead of a tutor, YFU might assign lessons in an online language program. This option requires computer access with speakers and a microphone.

If you want to use a textbook, you or your family can contact your Local Coordinator for more information about the Oxford Picture Dictionary.

**Have fun and make friends learning English!**



I got sick of this language because whatever I said I had to repeat several times. I stopped talking for a while, but soon things got better.

-YFU student from Finland

# Getting Settled in the US

## Your Host Family

The most important part of getting settled in the US is becoming a member of your host family. YFU host families are caring people, and they want to share their lives with you. Each family is also unique. Most YFU host families are not rich, do not live in a certain place, or fit one kind of image. They have invited you to be a part of their family, not a guest. That means you need to learn how they work and live together so that you can fit in. Here are some suggestions to think about and talk over with your host family.

Calling others by name acknowledges a connection and a relationship and helps make you part of the family. You may not know what to call your host parents. **Ask them what they would like to be called, and let them know what is comfortable for you.** Some students call their host parents “Mom” or “Dad.” Others use their host parents’ first names or even “Mom Jane” or Dad John.”

## What to Expect

The United States is a land of many people with diverse backgrounds. As such, there is no singular family dynamic that can capture the “all-American family.” Just think of how your family at home compares to your friends’ families. Some families have a mother and father with children. There are families with a single parent and a child, or a couple with a pet. The best way to enter a family is with an open heart and an open mind. The choices you make throughout your exchange are much more important than the makeup of your host family.

## Curfew

A curfew is a set time by which all children must be home. Most American families have a curfew for their children. Some cities or suburbs have a community curfew for all people under the age of 18 years old. Exchange students and natural children should always respect the established curfew.

## Discipline

When a household rule has been broken, there is generally a consequence. Consequences range from limiting computer and TV time to disallowing participation in a specific social event. Some families use physical punishments on their own children, such as spanking, pinching or slapping. This may be shocking to you, especially if it is uncommon in your home culture, but this is legal and culturally okay in some parts of the US. **It is NEVER OK for a host family member to use any type of physical punishment on an exchange student.**

## Household schedules

Every family has developed a routine for how they live. Each family’s routine or schedule is different. It is important to watch and learn what your family does and at what times. Ask your family about the time they eat and if everyone is expected to eat together. Learn the rules for when to bathe or shower, what to do with dirty clothes, when it is OK for you to be in your room by yourself, etc.

## Personal hygiene

Customs of how one bathes (or showers), and how often, vary from culture to culture. Some people think that Americans are too concerned about cleanliness and body odor. But it is customary in the US to shower or bathe daily and change into clean underclothes. Americans generally consider body odor offensive. Both men and women use underarm deodorants, and women generally shave their underarms and legs.

Some people from other countries consider these daily rituals unnecessary or luxurious. But this is an important American value which your host family will hope you will practice. Please plan on developing these habits from the beginning of your stay in the US. Personal space. You may have your own bedroom, or you may share one. Remember that even though you have some “personal space,” your room is still a part of your host family’s house. You will be expected to keep your room, including your closet, clean and neat.

## Privacy

Everyone needs to be alone sometimes. You will need it and other family members will, too. Try to find out the times your host family is expected to be together and when it is all right for you to be alone. This is important. **If you spend too much time in your room, your family will worry that you are unhappy, you don’t like them, or you are sick.** You will also miss opportunities to share time with your family. **Try to spend the “family times” with them.** Family times may be dinner, immediately after dinner, on Sunday, etc. Spending time together ranges from eating together, just talking, playing games, and watching TV to going out together. On the other hand, your family will understand that you need time to read, study, blog and email. Be aware of the whole family, not only yourself.

## Household chores

Very few families in the US have house maids, house cooks or butlers. This means that all members of the family usually share the duties and jobs around the house. From a young age, most children learn to take care of their own rooms and help with little jobs (“chores”) like emptying wastebaskets and washing dishes. Teenagers frequently have regular duties such as cutting the grass, washing the car, vacuuming, or helping to wash and iron clothes. You will need to do your share when you live in a family that does all their own housework.

It is a very good idea for you to talk to your family about what chores you can start helping to do. Also, before you begin, ask how to do them—for example, how to use the vacuum cleaner or washing machine. Your host family may not know that your natural family has different systems or machines, and they may not think about explaining how to do things. It is better to ask before you try something than to learn later that it was wrong, or to break a piece of equipment.

## Share yourself

Your host family has invited you to live with them because they want to get to know you and learn about your country. They want to share their ideas and help you understand the US. Spend time with each member of your family. If your host parents are home when you return from school, talk to them about your day and theirs. Talk to them about things you do not understand. Ask if you can help them with the chores in the afternoon.

At dinnertime, join in the family conversation so you can get to know your host family. Find out about your host parents' work and what family members do for fun. Perhaps you may even enjoy some hobbies or outings together, like stamp collecting, yoga or going to a football game.

Make a special effort to spend time with the children in the family. It is especially important to show interest in host brothers and sisters your own age and those who are younger than you are. It is easy for them to become jealous of the attention you receive. Try to teach them about your own customs while asking and learning from them about theirs. Respect their private times and their own friends. **You will not necessarily be best friends with your host brothers and sisters, but you should be friendly with them.**

## Show appreciation

Showing appreciation is a big cultural value in the US. Very few things are more important in your new home than thanking your host family for what they do for you. It is not customary in the US to give expensive gifts or big parties to thank someone. Small things that will make your family feel good include a smile, saying "Thanks, Mom," willingly helping with chores, writing a thank you note, or cooking a special dish. It may be done very differently in your own country, but appreciation is always important.

## Follow your host family's rules

Many exchange students who come to the US believe they will have great independence. **In fact, all families have rules.** You will probably be expected to follow the same rules as other teenagers in your family. If there are no teenagers in your home, your host family will set rules like families with teenagers. Regardless of what you are accustomed to in your natural family, you are expected to follow the rules of your host family. If you feel that your host family rules are unreasonable, it is OK to talk with your Local Coordinator about them.



**Know that there is always somebody that you can talk to at YFU USA.**  
**You can call 1.202.774.5200.**

## Look for the positive

You probably won't like everything about your new family. That is normal. No one is happy about everything that happens at home, such as some of the expectations, some of the rules, some of the food, or maybe the way a family member behaves. There are always pleasant and unpleasant aspects of family life, much like with your own family. But everyone needs to think about the positive. Learn to ignore the things that bother you and concentrate on what you enjoy. If you have difficulties, talk to your host family and try to work them out. If you are uncomfortable bringing up a topic with your host family, ask your Local Coordinator to help you.

On the other hand, you are allowed to say "no" if you are uncomfortable. You have the right to reject unwanted and inappropriate attention such as teasing or touching. If anyone treats or speaks to you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, say so, and ask that person to stop. Know that there is always somebody that you can talk to at YFU USA. You can call **1.202.774.5200**. Don't be afraid to make your feelings known.

## Stay healthy

Staying in good health will help you enjoy your exchange experience. Here are some tips:

- Try to eat food that is good for you, and avoid foods with too much fat, sugar, or caffeine. Sometimes exchange students become too concerned about gaining weight, more than they need to be. Talk to your host family or your Local Coordinator if you are extremely worried about this.
- Exercise will help you stay healthy. Many Americans walk or jog in their neighborhoods for exercise. Others join school or community sports teams or do aerobic exercises and other physical activities with groups in the community.
- Sleeping regularly is important for good health. You may need more sleep than you did at home because you get tired from concentrating on so many new things during the day.
- Tell your host family when you feel sick, and they will help you decide whether or not to see a doctor. If you have medicine you should take, don't forget to take it.

## Bike safety

When biking in the U.S., it's important to be aware of some key differences compared to other countries. Speed limits can be higher, cars are often larger, and the culture around biking and walking may vary significantly. This means you need to be extra cautious and always follow local traffic rules. Make sure to wear a helmet, use bike lanes where available, and be visible to drivers. Understanding these differences and practicing safe biking habits will help you stay safe while enjoying your time in the U.S. Avoid biking at night for your safety, and check with your host family about specific bike laws in your area.



## Your Friends

### Friends in your country

The roles of friends vary from one culture to another. You may have friends now that you have had for as long as you can remember. You may have had the same classmates ever since you began school. Perhaps your friends are very close to you; perhaps you have a few close friends and many acquaintances (people you know but who are not close friends).

### Friends in the US

You may find that friends in the US are not so permanent. Many American families move from one place to another every few years. This means that new friends must be found. It also means that Americans are friendly and outgoing, and they need to try to find friends. The American definition of friendship is very broad and can include a range of people from acquaintances to long-term close friends.

The same thing will happen to you. You will be new to your family, your school, and your community. Your host family will take you places and help you meet people. They may help you at school and in the neighborhood, or through groups to which they belong in the community, such as church groups. People join groups or clubs to make friends. You, too, will have to look for groups of people you relate to in order to find new friends.

At school, you will find that students do not stay in the same class together all day. The students in one subject may not be in any other subject together during the day. **Students make friends in clubs after school**—sports clubs, hobby groups, drama and singing groups, etc. They also make friends through youth groups in the community and at their religious services. This may be a new idea for you. You will have to look for new ways to make friends while you are in the US.



### Meet lots of people and make lots of friends

That is one way to learn and enjoy the many aspects of life in the US. It is easy to have just one friend, especially a girlfriend or boyfriend. This is not a good idea for you as an exchange student because it limits your opportunities to meet and get to know other people. You should try to get to know many different people and spend your time with them, not with just one American or other exchange students. You may be strongly tempted to spend a lot of time with other exchange students or other “foreigners.” But the more time you spend with them, the less time you have to get to know the US culture directly, through its own people.

### Connect with American Friends

Staying in touch with your new American friends will most likely involve checking social networking sites like Facebook regularly. It is a good idea to change the language setting on your social network sites to English. This will allow your new friends to find and interact with you. Also, navigating your accounts in English gives some extra practice with your new English vocabulary. Posting is Never Private. Keep in mind that all your online comments are public (anyone can see them). If you post something negative about a friend, teacher, or member of your host family, it will cause conflict. Think about how you would feel if someone were to write negative statements about you for all to see. If you are not getting along with someone, remember that your first points of support are your host family and YFU Local Coordinator.

### Be a cultural ambassador

Don't forget that although you must learn about US culture, you are also a cultural ambassador from your country. You have a lot to share about your own cultures and customs. Others may view your country and its citizens based on your behavior.

## Your School

Going to school in the US is a fantastic opportunity to really understand US teenagers. You will also have the chance to study new subjects, possibly in a very different way from the teaching style you know from home. You are expected to work hard in school, and to adjust to the differences you find.

### Types of courses in the US

High schools in the US offer many different courses for students. There are college preparatory courses that are academic and are required for entrance to many universities. Many schools also offer job-related courses including secretarial subjects, business classes, mechanics and other trade skills, and sometimes computer science. Many students attend classes called “electives,” which they can choose in addition to the required courses. “Electives” include subjects like music, drama, visual arts, sports, school government, and journalism.

US schools have rules which might restrict the grade level to which you can be assigned. The school officials who agree to take exchange students make the final decision about your grade placement. Some US schools have regulations that all exchange students be registered as juniors (11th graders) or sophomores (10th graders). Your grade status will usually not prevent you from registering for classes appropriate for your academic level.

### Differences

You may find schools in the US very different because there are so many types of classes. You may find it more flexible than your own school because you probably will be allowed to choose some of your own classes. You may also feel that the school is less formal than your own because of different teaching styles and class schedules.

However, just because school is different doesn't mean it is “easier.” US students who want to go to college must not only take academic classes and receive high grades. They must also be active in school activities. Colleges and universities in the US require “well-rounded” students—those with broad educational backgrounds. There are three criteria for university admission: high grades in required academic classes; a high grade on a college entrance examination; and active participation in the arts, sports, school government, or similar activities.



**YFU wants you to have an authentic high school experience.**



### Your course schedule

As an exchange student, you may be required by your US high school to take some academic classes. They may be ones you do not have in your own school, such as US history and government, and American literature. Most exchange students also enjoy having the opportunity to take a class in cooking, pottery, or mechanics. Many YFU students help the foreign language teachers and talk about their countries and YFU with other students.

YFU encourages you to take at least one English course, one US history or government course, and one other academic subject. You should take a mixture of academic and elective classes. You may find academic classes very difficult, especially if your English is weak; however, taking only electives is not typical of the US high school experience. As your English improves, you will find academic classes easier to deal with.

### Homework

Your teachers will assign work and projects which will need to be completed outside of school. It is important to keep track of and to complete all homework as it counts towards your grade.

### College Plans

If you desire to attend an American college, such plans should be made separate from your time in the United States as a YFU exchange student. Host families are not expected to help students with such goals. The purpose of YFU exchange is to experience high school life and have a social and cultural experience. Spending time on college preparation takes valuable time away from your YFU experience.

## Your Community

### Get to know it

Before you feel at home in your community, you must get to know it. No matter how small the place you live in, you should find all of the services you need nearby. Walk around and discover your immediate neighborhood. Then find out where the resources are in your community: the grocery store, the post office, the bank, the library, clothing stores, bus stops, etc. You probably will feel much more at home once you know where these places are.

### Getting settled and feeling comfortable will take time

Be patient. Be active. Accept advice and help from your host family. Get involved. Meet people. Begin to make friends. Soon you will begin to feel at home in the US.

# When You Need Some Help

## Who Will Help You

All students face some adjustment problems. This is normal and nothing to worry about. If you need help while on exchange, simply ask for it.

Many people will be there to help you. Your host family, friends, YFU Local Coordinator, school counselors, YFU staff, and your embassy or consulate can all be of some help.

If a situation is uncomfortable, do not be afraid to discuss it with your family or to contact your YFU Local Coordinator. If you are unable to get help that way, then immediately contact your Support Services Manager or the YFU National Office (1.202.774.5200). For more serious problems, remember that you have legal rights in the United States. If you are the victim of a crime, tell your host family and YFU about it.

**If you need police or emergency medical help, call 911.**

## Your Host Family

You and your host family should be able to solve most problems that come up. You are a member of the family, and just like at home, the family is your main source of support. Trust your host parents, talk to them, and confide in them if you have problems. They cannot help you if they do not know that something is wrong.



**Let your family help you through the hard times. Trust them.**

Your family is willing to adjust to help you feel more comfortable. But you must also adjust and try to live as they do while you are in the US.

## Your Local Coordinator

The Local Coordinator who may have helped your host family prepare for your arrival and enroll you in school is there to help you. You should expect your Local Coordinator to communicate with you at least once per month, by phone, email or in person, to check on your progress and adjustment. **You must return your Local Coordinator's emails and phone calls and remember to set up your voicemail if you get a cell phone.** You should also send an email periodically to your Local Coordinator so that he or she knows how you are doing. You will also have your Local Coordinator's phone number and email. If you have not heard from them in a month, please contact him or her. If you have a problem that you and your host family are not able to solve, contact your Local Coordinator.

Local Coordinators have worked with many exchange students. Many have been exchange students or host parents themselves. They understand some of the difficulties in adjusting to a new culture. Be honest and open with your Local Coordinator. Many times, they can help with small problems or misunderstandings between you and your host family.

If you have problems getting along with your host family, you should talk to the family first—no matter how difficult you feel that may be. Try to find out exactly what the problem is and see if you can solve it together. If that is not possible, talk to your Local Coordinator. It is considered unfair to your family if you talk to neighbors or friends about problems without first talking to your host family. Your Local Coordinator will try to help you solve the problem with your host family.

## HELPFUL CONTACT NUMBERS

YFU USA National Office: .....1.800.833.6243

Travel Emergencies:.....1.202.774.5211

After-Hours Emergency Support: .....1.800.424.3691

US Dept of State Student Helpline:.....1.866.283.9090

## The YFU USA National Office

If for some reason your Local Coordinator cannot help you, or if they are not contacting you monthly, call the National Office. You can dial **1.202.774.5200** from anywhere in the US. It costs nothing to call this number, but it only works inside the US.

## Participant Services

YFU USA is interested in your comments about the program, both positive and negative. YFU Participant Services personnel are there to respond to comments from all YFU students, families, schools, etc. YFU Participant Services work with the US District Offices to respond directly to students' inquiries. At other times, if the student is back in their home country, Participant Services may respond through the YFU National Office of that country.

When situations arise that you feel have not been resolved using the YFU District Office, write to Participant Services. Your letter should include a short description of the situation, should specify dates on which events leading to the situation occurred and state who was consulted. Also, give a brief statement indicating the outcome you desire. The office will carefully investigate the situation and, as appropriate, later send a report directly to the student and natural family or the student's YFU National Office staff, who will report back to the student and natural family.

**You can contact Participant Services by writing, emailing, or calling.**

**Please find the contact information below:**

**Address:**

Participant Services  
Youth For Understanding USA  
3995 Fashion Square Blvd, Suite 2  
Saginaw, MI 48603

**Email:** [participantservices@yfu.org](mailto:participantservices@yfu.org)

**Phone:** 1.800.833.6243

## Department of State Student Resources

US host families, YFU international exchange students and the public may report circumstances impacting students' health, safety, and wellbeing during their exchange program to the Department of State by calling **1.866.283.9090** or emailing [jvisas@state.gov](mailto:jvisas@state.gov).

## Your Embassy or Consulate

Your home country's embassy or consulate can assist you with passport replacement, contact with relatives or friends in an emergency, give you names of attorneys and physicians, and in some cases access to national health insurance from your home country. If you think you need help from your embassy, contact your Local Coordinator first. There are many things your embassy cannot do, including cashing a check, arranging for free medical or legal assistance, or making travel arrangements.



# Policies and Procedures

YFU must have certain policies to be consistent, fair, and protective of all its participants. These guidelines are for all YFU students worldwide. Procedures to implement these policies may vary from country to country. Each YFU National Office may also determine specific procedures for students being hosted in their countries.

Read these policies very carefully so that you understand the rules of the YFU program. If you have questions, ask your National Office before you go to your host country. Please also review these policies with your host family when you arrive, to be sure that you and they both have the same understanding of YFU policies.

## Alcohol and Tobacco

### Policy:

Students are required to observe all laws of their host country regarding the minimum age for the use of alcohol and tobacco. 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. Therefore, no YFU student can legally drink while on program. Students who drink are breaking the law and will be considered for Early Return. Alcohol related medical treatment may not be covered by student medical insurance.

It is illegal for minors (those under the age of 21) to purchase, possess and/or use cigarettes or smoking materials. Many Americans recognize the health risks of smoking, and some Americans have strong feelings about the dangers of smoking. YFU USA advises students to try to quit smoking if they come to the US with this habit.



### The legal drinking age in the United States is 21.

Confirmed alcohol / tobacco / vape use will earn students automatic Probationary status with YFU.

## Breaking the Law

### Policy:

The nature and seriousness of the offense will determine the procedure and possible outcome. Criminal prosecution/ theft/shoplifting may be cause for an Early Return. The student and not YFU or the host family will be responsible for any expense caused by that student breaking the law.

### Specific policy for YFU USA:

When an arrest is made or a court appearance is scheduled, YFU USA recommends the student retain a lawyer. The student and the natural parents are responsible for all costs related to legal representation.

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 him or her to stay in the US, or the court date is after the regularly scheduled departure, the student will be considered Off Program as of flight time. The student and natural parents will be responsible for any and all necessary arrangements.

Before the age of 18, students are considered to be minors and are afforded special protections in juvenile court. When a student turns 18 however, they can be tried as an adult in a court of law. In some states, people as young as 16 can be tried as adults even though they are still considered minors.

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 and a person below the age of consent is assumed to be coercive since the minor is considered unable to give consent to the acts. **Gross sexual imposition is a serious offense for which offenders can receive lengthy prison sentences.** Laws about gross sexual imposition vary widely among states.

## Confidentiality

### Policy:

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

All those participating in YFU programs have the right to expect that YFU will share confidential information carefully and in accordance with applicable data protection laws. A major part of an exchange program is that students have information relating to their host family's private life. Students should treat such information with the respect and confidentiality that can be reasonably expected from an exchange student. 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 it is found that the student's use of personal belongings such as computers, cell phones or tablets makes it hard for him/her to fully participate in their host family, YFU may require the student to change or stop using these personal belongings in order to maintain the right 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 in order 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 inter-cultural learning experience. Therefore, YFU requires students to use such communication tools in ways that help students, natural parent/legal guardian(s), host families and other people in the host community to develop positive relationships which benefit all those participating in the exchange program.

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:

While you're in the US, try to limit how often you contact your family back home. It's better for them to get updates about your experience every so often rather than hearing from you all the time. Your host family can also send updates to your family, so everyone knows what's going on. When you do reach out, a quick text or email to let them know you've arrived safely is perfect. But don't spend too much time messaging or calling – it can make homesickness worse and mess with your adjustment to life here. Try to keep it to one email or call per week. If YFU feels like you're talking to your family too much, they might ask you to cut back. If excessive contact continues, this can be grounds for Early Return.



### While you're in the US, try to limit how often you contact your family back home.

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 inter-cultural learning experience.

## Counseling

### Specific policy for YFU USA:

YFU USA offers counseling services to students and host families, if needed. These services include help from Local Coordinators, National Office staff, and/or the School Counselor at the host school. If it is determined that a student needs to participate in regular, ongoing counseling sessions, YFU USA may recommend that the student return home. YFU USA does not have the capability to facilitate ongoing counseling sessions for any student.

**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 National Office at **1.202.774.5200**.

## 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 para-sailing. 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 at the National Office before any such activity begins.** If the student is unable to get the form to his or her natural parents for their signatures, the natural parents can write a letter which states that 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 (ATVs), automobiles, snowmobiles, 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 above 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, para-sailing, 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 whitewater rafting, etc.).

**If a student engages in a dangerous activity without seeking permission or after permission is denied, that student will be considered for Early Return.** If a student engages in a dangerous activity without ever having requested permission, the severity of the infraction and the amount of danger involved will determine the consequences. If a student chooses to participate in an activity that is prohibited and/or not covered by their insurance policy, the student and their natural parents are responsible for any medical bills that may be incurred.

## Disciplinary Procedures

YFU follows a disciplinary procedure to bring concerns to students' attention, provide encouragement for 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. Repeated disregard for host family, school or YFU rules will result in the student being placed on probation. Additionally, offenses that are deemed more serious in nature may result in the student immediately being placed on probation, without receiving a warning first. Probationary status means that the student will be considered for involuntary early return if his or her behavior does not improve or if he or she is 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 immediate Early Return.** This decision will be made based upon the nature of the offense by YFU USA in consultation with the student's home country YFU office, as well as law enforcement authorities.

## 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.



Permission to use farm equipment, other offroad 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.



## 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:

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 Definitions

### Voluntary Early Return (VER):

A VER occurs when a student wants to return home from their host country early. 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, YFU will generally try to provide the student with support to recognize the nature of their behavior and to work on improving that behavior. Generally, a student will receive a warning letter which advises them of the specific issues in their poor behavior. It explains 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 which again explains issues in the student's behavior as well as 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 USA, 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.



**All Early Returns must be approved by Youth For Understanding.**



## Electronics and Social Media

### Specific policy for YFU USA:

YFU USA has rules about online behavior. Bad decisions online can be seen by more people and can last longer than mistakes made in person. You need to follow all the rules your host family gives you about using phones, computers, and social media. If you don't, you could face serious consequences. Check out the appendices at the end of this handbook for more information (Cell Phone Guidelines, Computer Use and Internet Safety, 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 Posting.

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 you digitally share 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, being sure not to partake 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 full-time 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).

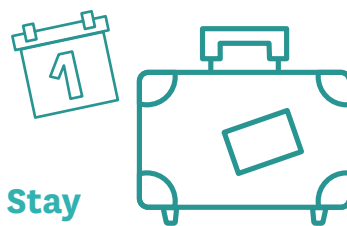
### Specific policy for YFU USA:

Students hosted in the United States are not allowed to engage in full-time employment during their stay. Students are, however, allowed to work for up to 10 hours per week in accordance with the regulations of their visa, which permits them to study and live in the US. This work must consist of informal jobs, such as babysitting, grass cutting, snow shoveling, yard cleanup, 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 and responsibilities than any other family member, or to work in a family business.



**Students in the YFU program are not permitted to work full-time during their stay.**



## Extensions 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 and require the student to 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. Students on Probationary status will not be granted extensions of stay.

An exception to this policy may be made for those participating in postsecondary 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 nonofficial online stores that require a payment, or official websites that allow downloading even with approval of the copyright holder. YFU students must not provide their media files online for other users to download. The students, not YFU, its representatives or its host families are 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.



**All YFU students must have insurance coverage for illness, medical emergencies, and hospitalization**



**Exchange students in the US are subject to all US national and local laws.**

## 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 wellbeing. 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.

## Natural Disaster

### Specific policy for YFU USA:

In the event of any natural disaster emergency, the host family should assist their host son or daughter in calling his or her 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, or the National Office (1.202.774.5200) as soon as possible to report their status.



## Orientations

### Policy:

YFU and the US Department of State require students to attend all orientations, as these are not only opportunities to get together with other exchange 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, so attending orientations should be a priority for students and their host families.



## 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 documents below, 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 DS2019 they should contact the National Office immediately. The student will be financially responsible for securing a replacement. A sample copy of the DS-2019 form can be found as an appendix to this handbook. This is not for use, but simply to serve as a visual example of the form.

### 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 securing Travel Permission from the YFU National Office. Should the student temporarily leave the US at any time during the stay, **these forms must be taken with them**. The DS2019 form acts as a reentry permit during the period of the program indicated once it has been signed by a designated YFU National Office staff person (a process outlined in the Permission to Travel form).

## 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 their host country, school and family.

## Political Expression

### Specific policy for YFU USA:

**Views.** The political views students express are their own. Students are in no way official representatives of their countries' governments. Students should tell this to people they meet who may think the students represent their countries officially.

**Involvement.** Since YFU is a nonpolitical 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.

## 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 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 their natural parents directly of the pregnancy.



**Students are not allowed to change families just because they are having trouble adjusting to the USA, want to move to a different size community or state, or come from a different socioeconomic level.**

## Religion

### Specific policy for YFU USA:

Exchange students and their host families frequently have different ideas about religion. YFU encourages students to join their host families in all their activities, including religious services, unless the students' beliefs make it impossible. 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 take advantage of the many other social activities offered by most US churches, synagogues, and temples. Students may find much better opportunities for friendships and social activities than expected. A student may wish to ask the host family to help find a congregation of the student's faith if it is different from that of the host family and 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 size community or state, or come 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 or the school.**

The decision to change families is made by YFU only after there has been discussion among the 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 our knowledge, it will put the student out of visa status and Off-Program.

## School

### Attendance:

All YFU students on high school or postsecondary education programs are expected to regularly attend secondary school or postsecondary education, and each host country is encouraged to see that a normal course of schoolwork is maintained. Repeated nonattendance, which in some countries is against visa conditions, will result in possible Early Return to their 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 of time, 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 their host school, the student will be returned to their home country.

### Specific policy for YFU USA:

The student will be enrolled in the local high school where arrangements have been made 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 granting 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. It is expected that YFU students maintain an overall “C” average or better in academic classes. **No student hosted in the US should expect, nor can YFU personnel guarantee, the award of a US high school diploma.** This is the decision of the individual school, and YFU will support the school’s policy in this matter.

Some schools provide, at their discretion, an honorary diploma or Certificate of Attendance. YFU will not make decisions for replacement based on a student’s desire to receive a diploma nor will YFU move a student specifically for this reason. Students are responsible for the work and expense of obtaining documents needed for home country school credit requirements. School fees are also the responsibility of the student.

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:

Students who smoke are encouraged to discuss house guidelines with host families before smoking in the homes. In the US, it is illegal for minors to purchase, possess and/or use cigarettes or smoking materials. If a student’s smoking becomes a problem in the host family or school, it could result in a warning and probation, and a request from YFU USA to quit smoking.

## Student Expenses

### Policy:

Students are not responsible for meals and accommodation. Students are responsible for such expenses as school uniforms, school laboratory fees\*, transport, 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 so that the student can purchase 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.

Most students will want to open a bank account. By using a W8 BEN form (obtainable at a bank, online at [irs.gov](https://www.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 W8 BEN form exempts foreign individuals from bank interest withholding rules. Students should not open a joint account with any host family member. Should there be any question, the student or host family should contact the Local Coordinator.



**All YFU students on high school or postsecondary education programs are expected to regularly attend secondary school or postsecondary education.**



## Student Travel

### Policy:

YFU wishes to:

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

Any travel which might have an impact on 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 attendance should not be interrupted for travel unless prior permission is given by the school.

All 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. Failure to obtain approval from YFU USA may result in forfeiting any monies paid if permission to travel is denied. Your Support Services Manager has the final authority to grant or deny permission for travel. Unauthorized travel may result in a YFU determination that the student has taken themselves 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 and if the behavior is not corrected, consideration of Early Return.



## 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 who consider 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 YFU.

# Preparing For Your Departure to The US

## School Credit Arrangement

### Credit in the US

School “credit” is recognition by a school that you have successfully taken classes and met academic requirements. You must work with both your school in your home country and in the US to obtain the proper documentation. It is important to know that not all schools give school “credit”.

Many schools do not allow exchange students to enroll as a senior (12th grade student) and YFU USA cannot guarantee that 12th grade (the final grade in high school) students will receive a US high school “diploma.” In fact, most exchange students do not receive such a diploma. Instead, many schools give an honorary diploma or a “Certificate of Attendance” to exchange students. Each school has the authority to decide which type of certificate is awarded to exchange students. **YFU USA cannot influence the school’s decision.** It will be based on individual school, state, or local policy. YFU USA will not change a school assignment for class year placement or to fulfill a desire to graduate.

### Credit in your home country.

It is your responsibility to work with your school in your home country to arrange credit for attending school in the US. As soon as possible, talk with your Local Coordinator and your principal or school director in your home country about what requirements you may have to meet. Your school at home may require a description of courses offered in the US. If so, you will need to make arrangements to send your course schedule to your home country secondary school after you have arrived and are enrolled in your US school. It is very difficult to get school documents once you have left a US school, so please be sure you have the necessary papers in hand when you leave.

## Medical Arrangements

The YFU sending offices provide students with medical insurance. You will receive information on what your insurance covers before you depart for the US. You will also receive basic insurance information, claims filing procedures (how to get money back from the insurance company), claim forms, and an insurance card either before you leave your home country or at your host family’s home in the US.

Your insurance will not cover preexisting conditions, medications not prescribed by physicians, routine examinations, suicide and attempted suicide, alcoholism, drug abuse or misuse of medication, nonemergency dental treatment, replacement of glasses or contact lenses, or immunizations in your home or host country. If you do not have extra personal insurance for the above situations, you will have to pay such costs yourself.



**Note that your family should continue your own health insurance in addition to that provided by YFU.**

**Remember, any medical condition that you have before going on the YFU program will not be covered by your YFU insurance. Therefore, you must pay the costs of doctor visits or medicine related to a preexisting condition.**

**Remember,** any medical condition that you have before going on the YFU program will not be covered by your YFU insurance. Therefore, you must pay the costs of doctor visits or medicine related to a preexisting condition.

**Note that your family should continue your own health insurance in addition to that provided by YFU.**

This will avoid complications if an illness were to develop while on program and is classified as preexisting upon the initiation of a new policy upon your return home.

Since medical expenses are rather high in the US, we strongly suggest that before you leave you **contact the insurance company of your natural parents to see if you can have extra insurance protection** as part of your family’s insurance while you are in the US.

### Medical and dental examinations

All students are required to have a medical and a dental examination before coming to the US. YFU will give you a health form that must be completed and signed by your family physician and dentist. You should have these health examinations done as soon as possible so YFU can send your health form to the US with your student file. Make sure that the medical history on your health form is complete and accurate, **especially regarding serious allergies.**

## Immunizations

US school authorities require specific immunizations for any student entering a school for the first time. The requirements vary from place to place within the US. Since students are required by law to have the required immunizations before entering school, it is better for you to get them before leaving your country. If you cannot, **you will not be allowed to start school until the immunizations are administered** in the US. You must pay for them yourself.

On your health form, there is a list of immunizations that most schools require. Remember to bring proof, such as a doctor's signed certificate, that you have received these immunizations. If there are additional tests you need, you will receive information in the YFU National Office Welcome Letter. Some schools will require additional immunizations that are not on the health form. Some or all required immunizations may not be covered by the health insurance policy through YFU; they must be acquired at the student's expense.

## Potentially restrictive health conditions

A "potentially restrictive health condition" is one that could possibly limit or affect your participation in normal activities. YFU accepts students on program if they have a potentially restrictive health condition (such as a serious allergy) and the student provides a physician's statement that the condition will not interfere with normal activities or be a problem for your host family. The physician's statement about the condition must be sent to your YFU National Office. It is extremely important that the information you give YFU is complete and truthful. The more accurate the information, the better YFU can place and assist the student if they need help during the exchange.

## Medication

If you take any medication regularly, bring enough of the medicine for the period of time you will be away from home. Have an extra copy of your physician's prescription as well as a full explanation—in English—of the dosage and use of any medicine you bring. Customs officials may want to see this when you enter the US. You will also need a copy of the prescription if you need to buy more of the medication while in the US. If the medication is expensive, you could take it on the plane, but make sure to check with the airline first to ensure that the medication is allowable in your carry-on luggage. When you arrive in the US, **talk with your host family about all medications you take, including homeopathic herbs.**

## Eyeglasses or contact lenses

If you wear glasses or contact lenses, bring your prescription with you. Also bring an extra pair of glasses if you have them. The cost of replacing lost or broken glasses or lenses is not covered by YFU insurance.



## Finances

### Your expenses

Remember that YFU does not pay your host family. Along with accepting you as a family member, your host family pays the largest portion of your living costs by giving you a home to live in and three meals daily.

You will, however, need your own "spending money" for all other expenses. These could include school supplies, bus fares, snacks, gifts, "long-distance" telephone calls, movies, sports events, and more. You must buy your own personal items, such as shampoo and deodorant. If you come from a warm climate and will be living where winters are cold, a few basic articles of winter clothing could cost you as much as \$300. You may have school-related expenses such as sports supplies, dances, science labs, and, in some schools, books or uniforms. **You will need to pay for your medical expenses until the insurance company sends you reimbursement.** You may also have to pay for medical expenses not covered by insurance, such as a sports physical examination or immunizations. If you travel with your school class or your family, you will probably have to help pay for the trip.

At the end of the school year many students wish to buy yearbooks (which cost approximately \$80) and class rings (which can cost from \$100–\$300). Some important school dances, such as the Homecoming Dance, may cost \$15–\$45 per person. End of year formal dances for the senior and junior classes (also known as "proms") may cost \$100 a couple or more, not including the cost of the fancy dresses and suits students often purchase to wear to them.

### Amount of money you need during your exchange

If you do not have an Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) card (see "How to get money from home" on the next page), bring at least \$400 in cash for the first 2 months. Otherwise, bring \$100 in cash and plan to withdraw money at the airport or in your new home city with your ATM card. YFU recommends that you budget at least \$300 for each month you are in the US. However, there are regional differences, and some localities are much more expensive than others. Depending on your host family's location, you may need additional monthly spending money.

## Your lifestyle and money

Your spending will depend on things like how many social events you go to, how much you're texting or calling home, your internet use, buying clothes, music, gifts, or anything else you need. It's a good idea to set a budget with your parents before you leave so you know how much money you'll need.

If you have the time and opportunity, you may be able to add to the money your parents send you by doing informal part-time jobs for neighbors, such as mowing the lawn or babysitting. You will find that many American teenagers earn some of their own money this way. These small jobs do not pay a lot, but they help and may allow you to do more things than you thought you could afford. (Note: see Employment for the YFU policy on students working.)

## Budgeting

Budget the spending of your money carefully. It is easy to spend money very quickly when you first arrive. There are so many new and different things. Take your time to look and decide what you really want. You will have a lot of time to shop. A part of your exchange experience should be making a budget for your six months or year and following it!

Handling money issues. Standards of living and costs of living vary around the world, even within the US. Sometimes there is a difference between the amount of money you can spend and the amount your host family or friends can spend. This may tempt you to borrow money from your host family, or to lend your host family or friends some money. You should not borrow or lend money, even with your host family. Borrowing money can make the relationship between you and your host family difficult, even if you get along very well overall. It may also be difficult for you or for them to repay debts.

If your host family lends you money in an **emergency**, create a written agreement including: the date, the amount you owe them, when you will pay them back, and both of your signatures. If you lend money to someone in an **emergency**, also create a written and signed agreement (even if the loan is to someone in your host family) including: the date, the amount they owe you, when they will pay you back, and both of your signatures. It is also advised that you notify your natural parents via email and attach their consent to your agreement. YFU USA is not responsible for students' debts or loans.

## Carrying money while traveling

Traveler's checks are the safest way to carry money while you travel, though Automated Teller Machine (ATM) cards will allow you easier access to cash. Bring at least \$400 in traveler's checks or a credit card for your first two months. Be sure to check with your bank or your home country YFU office on recommended practices for bringing funds into the US. Carry about \$50 in cash while traveling for any snacks or other necessities. It is wise to not carry more than \$100 in cash while traveling.

Never put cash or traveler's checks in your carry-on or checked luggage. Carry it near your body in a pouch under your clothing if possible, or in a protected pocket or purse.



### Learn From Other Students:

In the past we have had serious situations regarding money interactions where the student or their natural parents allowed a host family member access to their money, bank account or credit card, or wired funds directly to an account controlled by a host family member. As a result, we strongly urge you to handle money according to the following guidelines:

- Try to pay all bills yourself, rather than relying on others to pay on your behalf.
- Do not give anyone (including your host family) your credit card number, your bank account number, any banking codes or Personal Identification Numbers (PINs).
- Do not provide large sums of cash to anyone (including host family members) to pay bills on your behalf.
- Your natural parents should not wire money to your host family.
- If a payment by check is required, talk with your Local Coordinator about how to do this.
- If a wire payment from your natural parents is necessary to cover a debt, talk with your Local Coordinator so that this can occur through the formal YFU support network.

## How to get money from home

It is often very expensive to wire money internationally. Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs), which are located throughout most cities and towns, are one of the best options for getting money from your home country. Your parents can fund the account at a bank in your home country with your home currency, and then you can withdraw American dollars from an ATM with either a credit card or debit card issued by a major bank in your home country. Make sure your ATM and credit cards are part of the PLUS Network (Visa) or the Cirrus Network (MasterCard), or they may not work in the US. In order to deposit or withdraw money, you will need to have the Personal Identification Number (PIN) that was assigned to you when you received your card. There may be a \$2–\$5 fee for using an ATM machine. Using an ATM or credit card from your home country will allow your parents to keep track of your spending and will also likely provide you with the best exchange rate.

Because many American host families live in small communities, there is a good chance that you will not have access to a bank that does international wiring. If you do, the fee to wire money will be expensive. Using Western Union to wire and receive money is a more cost-effective option. Money can be sent online, by phone, or at an agent location (in grocery stores, convenience stores, etc.). YFU USA recommends that your family look into Western Union for more details. You can access Western Union on the Web at: [westernunion.com](http://westernunion.com).

## Bank accounts

You may wish to open a bank account in the US. This can be difficult to do without an adult cosigner. Check with your Local Coordinator to see what bank in your host town might allow you to open your own account. If you do choose to open an account, **you should NEVER open a joint account with your host family**, or give any member of your host family access to your account or ATM card. Be very careful with your Personal Identification Number (PIN); do not give this number to anybody. If the bank requires a Social Security number, call the YFU USA District Office to discuss your options. Keep track of what you spend and keep your bank statements as a record. Remember to close your account before you go home. If you have any problems with money or your bank account, notify YFU USA immediately.

## Planning What to Take to the US

### Pack lightly

It is wise to bring as little as possible from home for the following reasons:

Airlines allow you to take only one or two pieces of checked luggage and one bag that you can carry on the plane (but which must be able to fit underneath the airplane seat). Also, airlines have luggage weight and size limits. If your bags exceed those limits, you will be asked to pay for the excess luggage, or the airline may simply refuse to take all the luggage you have.

You will be responsible for all your own luggage. You may have to carry it often.



**Do not bring more than you can carry alone.**

Your parents can probably send you more belongings after you have arrived at your host family's home. But don't have them send so much that you won't be able to carry it back. At the program's end you will have to get all your belongings home again. If your luggage exceeds airline allowances, you will have to mail things home before you leave or pay excess baggage fees. It is your responsibility to mail packages home and pay for the postage.

### Clothing

YFU students are placed throughout the US. Our country is so large and the weather so varied that it is difficult to recommend exactly what to take.

For appropriate clothing for the state in which you will live, read the welcome letter from your US District Office. You might also want to buy some clothes while in the US, especially if you come from a very different climate. The chart below is a very basic clothing list. Change it according to what you learn about your host area.

### Gifts

Think carefully about the gifts you will take to your host family. The cost is not important; it is your thoughtfulness in bringing something from your country that is important. You may want to include a few extra gifts for other people you meet. When choosing gifts, consider their size and weight. They must be packed in your luggage.

Some gifts that you could bring include:

- Photo books of your country or region showing geography, historical places, views of rural and city life, etc.
- Special foods or beverages of your region or country, such as fruit preserves, candy, etc. (US law prohibits bringing fresh meat, fruit, plants, or other living things into the US.)
- Handicrafts of your country or region.

If the total value of your gifts is more than \$100, you will have to pay an import tax ("duty") to US Customs when you enter the country. Remember: Choosing your gift thoughtfully is much more valuable than the amount of money you spend.

## Some things from home

Do not forget to bring along a few things that you enjoy and can share with others. Here are some ideas:

- A framed photo and/or photo album of family, home, friends, school, and country.
- Sports equipment for your favorite sports.
- Hobby materials—for sketching, painting, collecting, reading, or whatever you like to do when you have free time. If you are serious about music, you may want to bring your musical instrument.
- A few books you would like to read in your native language.
- A book about your country, your school yearbook, or recent magazines to share with your new family and friends.

Think about what other things you might like to have while away from home. These are not to help you escape from living in the US; they are to help you share some important parts of your life with your new host family and friends.

What not to bring. Do not bring electrical equipment unless it has a current of exactly 120V/60Hz or you have an adapter. Battery powered equipment is not a problem, but should not be packed in checked luggage.

## Travel Documents

### Passport

To enter the US, you need a passport issued by your country. Your YFU National Office will give you instructions on how to obtain one. If you already have a passport, check the expiration date. **Your passport must be valid for six months after the date of your departure from the US at the end of your exchange.**



**It is important that you keep a copy of all travel documents with you whenever you travel anywhere.**

### DS-2019

YFU will give you a DS-2019 form (also known as “Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status”). This form is sent by YFU USA to your YFU National Office, who will then send it to you. First, make sure your name is written exactly the same way in both your passport and your DS2019. (For example, if your passport says “Susan Ann Smith,” your form must also say Susan Ann Smith— not Susan Smith or Susan A. Smith.) If the names are not written exactly the same way, notify your YFU National Office immediately. Second, you must read the statements on the back of the form, and sign at the bottom of page one indicating that you have read and agree. Take your DS2019 form to the US Consulate when you apply for your visa. (Note: A consulate may or may not be located in an embassy.) A sample copy of the DS-2019 form can be found as an appendix to this handbook. This sample is not for use, but simply to serve as a visual example of the form.

### SEVIS I-901 Fee and I-797 Receipt

The SEVIS I-901 fee is mandated by the US Congress to support the automated system that keeps track of students and exchange visitors and ensures that they maintain their status while in the United States. Each student or exchange visitor issued a DS-2019 is responsible for paying this fee to SEVIS. To apply for a visa, you must have your receipt showing that you have paid the SEVIS fee. Don't forget to bring your SEVIS fee receipt to the consulate. Your YFU National office will give you instructions for submitting your SEVIS fee. You can also find more information about the SEVIS fee or pay the fee electronically by going to [fmjfee.com](http://fmjfee.com).

### Visa

A visa is a stamp that the consulate puts in your passport. It gives you permission to enter the US. Most YFU students come to the US on J-1 visas. **Please check to be sure that the visa you receive says “J-1”—if it says something different, notify your YFU National Office immediately.** The J-1 visa is a “non-immigrant, exchange visitor” visa. When in the US on this visa, you may not work and you must attend school. This is not a tourist visa and it is only valid while you are on the YFU program. Your visa may be valid for less than the time of your exchange. This is not a problem as long as you use your visa to enter the US within the dates that it is valid.

## Parents' Permission to Travel Outside the US

While in the US, some students get the chance to travel with their host families or schools to Mexico, Canada or the Caribbean. If you already know that you will be traveling to any other country while in the US, it is a good idea to bring a letter with you stating your parents' permission. **Written permission from your natural parents is required before you are allowed to travel outside the US.** The letter should be typed—not handwritten—and it must give your name, both of your parents' names, state that you are a Youth For Understanding student, and it must say that you have permission to enter Mexico, Canada or a country of the Caribbean. All legal guardians must sign it.

## Special Note:

**The Mexican Consular section requires students traveling to Mexico to have the above letter from legal guardians notarized; subject to change per Mexican visa requirements.**

**If you travel outside of the US while you are a YFU student, you must get YFU permission first (see "Travel Policy" pp.43-45). This is in addition to your parents' permission. Take all your travel documents (DS-2019 and passport) with you.**

## On The Airplane

### US Customs Declaration

On the airplane you will receive a "Customs Declaration" form. You must complete this form and have it ready to give to the customs official in the airport. Study the form so that you understand it. The customs official may ask you to show the gifts you are bringing to the US. Be sure you do not have any fresh meat, plant products, or other living things.

## At The Airport

**The US Border Patrol Officer at the airport will ask to see your:**

- **Passport**
- **Visa**
- **DS-2019 Form**

Always keep the DS-2019 Form in your passport. **Have them all ready!**

### CBP Stamp

The Border Patrol Officer will give you a CBP admission stamp in your passport. This stamp indicates your date of arrival in the US, your J-1 class admission and your admitted date. You are permitted to stay in the US until this admitted date. You can get your electronic arrival/departure record at [cbp.gov/I94](http://cbp.gov/I94).

**Be sure all your documents are returned to you**—you will need them in the US. If you lose any of them, contact your Local Coordinator immediately!

Because of increased security in the US, you may be asked additional questions or be fingerprinted and have your photograph taken. Please cooperate with all requests made by the Border Patrol Officer.



**Always keep the DS-2019 Form in your passport. Have them all ready!**



## Travel Arrangements

Most students on the YFU program will travel to the US on flights arranged by YFU USA. Otherwise, a student's home country arranges the travel. Students whose travel was arranged by YFU USA will travel as a group on regularly scheduled commercial flights.

### Luggage

Airlines have very restrictive and changing luggage policies. Students should check individual airlines for their rules and fees for carry-on and checked luggage. Be prepared to pay extra fees for your luggage.

YFU USA will send you the luggage regulations that apply to your flight. **Follow these instructions.** Note that what is permitted in your checked and carry-on luggage frequently changes due to security concerns in the US. Check **TSA's Travel Tips** for up to date information. If you have too much luggage or it is too heavy the airline may charge you for the extra luggage or they may simply refuse to take it, even if you are willing to pay. YFU USA is not responsible for any fees or expenses that you may be charged due to extra or overweight luggage. Remember, you will have to carry your own luggage while you are traveling. **Do not bring more than you can carry at one time!** (See also "Planning What to Take to the US")

Your YFU National Office may give you special YFU luggage tags. If not, we recommend you get your own tags. **On the tags, write your name and your host family's address in the US.** Be sure that you put the tags on each of your suitcases. It is also a good idea to put your name and host family address somewhere inside your luggage in case the outside tag is lost.

**Never leave luggage unattended while traveling. Not only is this required for security reasons (you will be asked this question at the airline counter), but you also don't want to lose your luggage! So, keep it with you at all times—even if this means taking it in the bathroom.**

This is a very important security matter.



**Never leave luggage unattended while traveling.**

### Tickets

Most students will be issued electronic tickets and will receive a print-out of their itinerary to use for check-in at the airport. Some students will receive paper tickets.

**Be very careful with your paper tickets, as they may include a ticket for flying back home at the end of your time in the US.**

## Travel to the US

Your YFU National Office will give you your travel information, including your international flight schedule and flight schedule in the US. The YFU USA Travel Office will tell your host parents the date and time of your arrival. Either your host family or your Local Coordinator will meet you at your final destination. There may be YFU travel staff assisting you to your final destination. YFU travel staff wear t-shirts with the YFU logo on the front and TRAVEL STAFF written in white on the back.

Upon your arrival in the US, you will have to pass through Customs and Immigration. For security reasons, YFU Travel Staff will not be allowed to enter the Customs and Immigration area. This means that you will go through this process on your own or with other YFU students. After you have exited Customs and Immigration you are to proceed directly to the gate for your connecting flight or to baggage claim if you are at your final destination. There are many students traveling, and the staff cannot meet everyone. **If you wait for the travel staff to find you, you may miss your connecting flight.** If you have problems in the airport and are not with the airport staff, YFU Travel can always be contacted at **1.202.774.5211**.

Sometimes a student cannot make the trip to his or her host family all in one day or flights in the US are delayed or canceled because of weather or mechanical problems. This may mean a student must travel the next day and stay overnight in an airport hotel. In these cases, YFU Travel will make arrangements for you to stay in a hotel. The YFU airport staff will help you get your hotel room and meals and will also stay overnight in the same hotel. The YFU airport staff will also help you get back to the airport the next day for your flight. YFU Travel will notify your host family of any itinerary changes.

If your travel was not arranged by YFU USA or if you are traveling off of group travel, there will not be staff in the airports, but YFU Travel is always available at **1.202.774.5211** if you have a problem while traveling. If your flight is canceled, contact YFU Travel immediately for instructions about how to schedule a different flight. When you get a new itinerary, call **1.202.774.5211** again so that YFU Travel can notify your host family of the changes. If your new flight is the next day and you need to stay overnight, YFU Travel can get a hotel room for you near the airport.

All students can contact YFU Travel at **1.202.774.5211** if they have problems in the airport. It is free to call from any public telephone. If you are unable to find a public telephone, ask your airline if you can call a toll-free number from their phone. It is very important to call this number first so that YFU Travel can help you. Calling your natural parents first will only delay you further because they cannot help you with travel arrangements.

# Pre-Departure Checklist

You have many things to think about as you get ready for your exchange experience. To help you remember the important things, you'll need to complete the checklist below. Everything on it is essential, so be sure you do everything! Check off each task as you complete it, so you know it is done.

- Apply and get your passport.
- Have a physical examination.
- Have a dental examination.
- Complete the YFU health form and send to your YFU National Office.
- Get any immunizations required for school, if possible.
- Get a letter from your physician about any restrictive condition. Send this to your YFU National Office.
- Get copies of prescriptions (medications, eyeglasses) to carry to the US.
- Get extra medication you will need while in the US.
- Talk to your home school about its requirements for accepting credit from your US high school. Get any forms you may need to be signed by your school in the US.
- Complete the DS-2019 Form and take it with your passport to the US Embassy or Consulate to get a J-1 visa for the US.
- Get a two language-dictionary for English and your native language. You may not be able to find one in the US.
- Buy or prepare clothing you need from the basic list
- Choose some small gifts to bring for your host family.
- Choose the "things from home" you would like to take with you while on exchange.
- Get an ATM card, as well as US dollars to take with you.
- Plan with your natural family how and when they will send you money.
- Attend all orientation meetings or programs provided by YFU.
- Pack your luggage so its size and weight are acceptable to the airline. Be sure you can carry your luggage by yourself. Don't forget your YFU luggage tag(s).
- Put a YFU tag on each piece of your luggage. Write your name and address of your host family in the US on each tag. Also put a tag with your name and US address inside each piece of luggage.
- Pack health insurance information provided by your YFU National Office.
- Prepare a packet to carry with you on the plane that includes the following: airline ticket/e-ticket itinerary, passport, DS-2019 Form, the emergency travel number (1.202.774.5211), special medical information from your physician (if needed), and your host family's contact information.
- Review your application and the parent/student agreement.
- Your host family has been selected based on what you wrote on your application. If anything has changed (smoking, health, other important information), write to your YFU National Office or US National Office and explain.
- Save this handbook and keep it readily available. You will need it!**

# Appendix I: YFU Structure

## YFU National Offices Around the World

Each YFU partner country has a National Office or committee that administers YFU programs in that country. It may have paid staff or both paid and volunteer staff. Some National Offices also have smaller offices in other parts of their countries.

The National Office and any smaller offices recruit students to go abroad, find families to host students coming into the country, and help students and families during the exchange experience. **Much of this work is done by volunteers. YFU volunteers do not get paid for their work for YFU.** They do it because they support the goals of YFU and are deeply committed to helping exchange students and host families get the most out of this special experience. In fact, most people who do work for YFU around the world are volunteers. You will hear from your YFU National Office before you go to your host country. While you are in the US, you will work with your locally assigned YFU staff and Local Coordinator.

## YFU In the US

### YFU National Office

Although most exchange students never have direct contact with the YFU USA National Office, it is from here that YFU USA coordinates with all other countries exchanging with the US. You will receive a letter of welcome from the National Office soon after you are accepted on the YFU program. The National Office welcome letter will give you information on the YFU program in the US, American families, and American high schools.

**The Local Coordinator** is perhaps the most important YFU person you will know while in the US. There are nearly 400 Local Coordinators in the US. Some of them have been exchange students, many have been host family members, others are teachers, business people, homemakers, etc. Many Local Coordinators live in the same community where students are placed. They are friendly people there to help you, your host family, and your school during the YFU exchange experience. Local Coordinators are trained and work closely with YFU USA in all the work they do. Please make sure to thank your Local Coordinator from time to time.

**Your Local Coordinator is the first person to call when you need help from YFU USA.** Local Coordinators are there to give you support and information and to help clear up misunderstandings if any occur between you and your host family, or you and your school.

You will receive the name and telephone number of your Local Coordinator immediately after you arrive in the US. You will also be contacted by your Local Coordinator soon after you arrive.

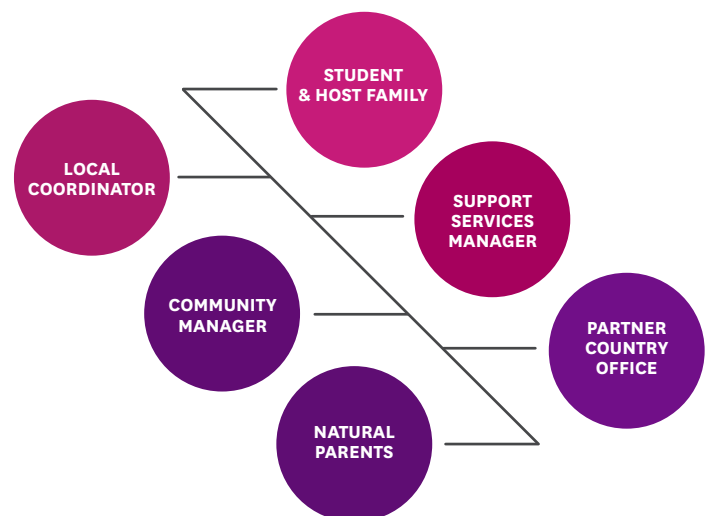
**The Community Manager** is a full-time YFU employee and is responsible for the administration of programs for all international students and host families in the region as well as US students going abroad from that area. The Community Manager may have responsibility for 50 to 75 students. This person is also responsible for supervising the Local Coordinators and volunteers who work locally with host families, students, and schools in that region.

The Community Manager also works closely with the Local Coordinators who recruit host families and place international students in host family homes. They also work as a public relations person in connection with host family recruitment and promoting YFU exchanges to American high school students.

When you are in the US, if you meet American teenagers who are interested in student exchange or American families who are interested in hosting foreign students, tell your Local Coordinator or Community Manager.

**The Support Services Manager (SSM)** coordinates the support activities for all participants in the district. The SSM is the primary contact for a student's sending office overseas, the Local Coordinator and the Community Manager in resolving student/host family issues. The SSM may communicate directly with students or host families when appropriate and necessary.

## YFU's Lines of Communication



# Appendix II: Using a Telephone in the US

## Long-Distance and International Calls

Students should make arrangements with their host families before making long-distance and international calls. The family should know who the student is calling and how the call will be paid. If a student is using a phone card, they need to be sure that there is enough value on the card to cover the cost of the call. If the student has the host family's permission to charge the call to their telephone bill, the student should find out how much the call will cost and watch the clock when calling. The student must pay the host family back immediately.

## Local Calls

Dial the seven digit telephone number, as given (e.g. 333.4455). In some areas you will need to dial ten digits for local calls (e.g. 202.333.4455). The extra three digits are for the area code.

Information. If you cannot find the number of a local person or business, dial 411 for directory assistance. Tell the operator the name of the city and the name of the person you wish to call, and you will be given the number if it is listed. There may be a charge for information calls.

## Long-Distance Calls (for landlines only)

This is a call made to another town or state. The cost for a long-distance call depends on the time of day, the length of time you talk, the distance of the call, and the type of call. When you are dialing a number that is not within your local calling area, you may need to dial a 1 and a three-digit area code preceding the phone number (e.g. 1 + 202.333.4455). This denotes a long-distance call, and thus a long-distance fee will be incurred. All numbers beginning with 1.800, 1.866 and 1.877 are toll free from landline phones, while numbers beginning with 1.900 are toll calls.

## Collect Calls

Collect calls are long-distance calls made to people who agree to accept the charges. Do not accept a collect call unless you are willing to pay for it. Do not make a collect call unless you think the person called will accept the charges.

International Calls. Most countries of the world may be directly dialed from the US. For assistance with these calls, call the long-distance operator of your host family's phone company. Remember that the rates to many countries are lower during night hours and on Sunday.

## Budgeting and Paying for Calls

If phone calls are charged to the host family's bill, the student is expected to pay all the telephone bills on time and before leaving the US. Neither the host family nor YFU will pay bills for a student. If a student would like to use a cell phone, he or she should purchase a prepaid phone with a prepaid plan. Under no circumstances should a host family enter a cell phone contract with or on behalf of a student.

## Pre-Paid & Pay As You Go Cell Phones

These are a great option if you need a cell phone while you are in the US. (You will not be able to subscribe to a monthly plan while in the US.) You simply purchase a phone from a company which has a "prepaid" option. Then you pay for a certain number of minutes/text messages. Once you have used up that amount, you need to go back to the store to purchase more minutes. You can buy a prepaid phone at any big box store (including Target, Walmart, Best Buy, etc.) or at a wireless phone store (e.g. Verizon, AT&T, Sprint, etc.). Costs of prepaid phones and pay as you go phones vary greatly. Expect to pay at least \$20, however costs can be as high as \$200, or more, for a phone with numerous features. Costs per minute can vary but may be around \$.10 per minute. Other plans can provide a flat rate per month. Research phone plans prior to departure so you can make the best decision for your budget.

## Making International Phone Calls

With all the technological advances being made, calling cards are becoming a thing of the past. While calling cards can be purchased at many convenience, grocery, and drug stores, mobile phone apps like WhatsApp and FaceTime are great alternatives. Regardless of which method you choose to use, be sure to never place an international call from your host family's telephone without both their permission and a calling card.

## Emergency Calls

Dial 911 when you need emergency help from the fire department, the police, or an ambulance. (911 service may not be available in all areas. Check with your host family.) Do not call 911 if it is not an emergency – that is illegal.

# Appendix III: The Exchange Visitor Program

## Welcome Brochure

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) at the United States Department of State welcomes you to the United States.

We are pleased to receive you as an exchange visitor. As an Exchange Visitor Program participant, you will acquire an experience in the United States, and as an ambassador of your country you will help educate the American people about your home country and culture.

This brochure will help you understand the purpose of the Exchange Visitor Program, provide you with information on contacting the Department of State, and introduce you to some of the major requirements of the Exchange Visitor Program regulations.

## The Exchange Visitor Program

**The U.S. Department of State** administers the Exchange Visitor Program under the provisions of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, as amended. The Act promotes mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange. The Exchange Visitor Program provides foreign nationals opportunities to participate in exchange programs in the United States with the expectation that on completion of their exchange program, they will return home to share their experiences.

### Sponsors

The U.S. Department of State designates U.S. organizations such as government agencies, academic institutions, educational and cultural organizations, and corporations to administer exchange visitor programs. These organizations are known as sponsors. Sponsors screen and select exchange visitors to participate in their programs based on the regulations governing the exchange activity and stated in 22 CFR Part 62. Sponsors provide exchange visitors pre-arrival information, an orientation, and monitor activities throughout their exchange program. Sponsors offer or identify cross-cultural activities that will expose exchange visitors to American society, culture, and institutions. You are encouraged to participate in activities that provide them with an opportunity to share their language, culture, and history with Americans.

### Responsible Officers

Sponsors appoint individuals as responsible officers and alternate responsible officers to advise and assist exchange visitors. These officers issue the Certificate of Eligibility (Form DS-2019) and conduct official communications with the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on your behalf. Your sponsor's role is to help you manage your program. If problems arise or you have questions, your sponsor is there to help you. Should you have any questions about the regulations or any aspect of your exchange program, your initial and primary contact is your sponsor. Unless provided specific contact information by your sponsor you should contact the person whose name and telephone number can be found on your Form DS-2019.

### Exchange Visitor

An exchange visitor is a foreign national selected by a sponsor to participate in an exchange visitor program and who is seeking to enter or has entered the United States temporarily on a J-1 visa.

**Spouse and dependents** Some categories of the Exchange Visitor Program permit a spouse and/or unmarried children, under 21 years of age, to accompany an exchange visitor to the United States. These individuals may apply for J-2 visas with the permission of your sponsor.

## USA Regulations and Rules

**It is important that you** understand and abide by the Exchange Visitor Program regulations, U.S. laws and sponsor rules. Regular contact with your sponsor will help you keep current with any change which may affect your J-1 visa status. Some requirements of the Federal regulations and where to find them are indicated below.

### Activities and Program Provisions

You entered the United States in a specific program category, and are required to engage in that category and the activity listed on your Form DS-2019. You must comply with the specific program provisions of the regulations relating to your exchange category.

### Maintenance of Valid Program Status

You are required to have a valid and unexpired Form DS-2019. Sponsors may terminate an exchange visitor's program for violating U.S. laws, Exchange Visitor Program regulations, or the sponsor's rules governing their particular program.

Report Abuse or Exploitation – If you are mistreated and/or your rights are violated, and your sponsor is not providing the help you need, contact the Department of State for assistance.

**J-1 Visa Emergency Hotline:**

1.866.283.9090.

This line is for use by exchange visitors and third parties in the case of urgent situations. A Department of State representative is available 24 hours a day.

**Regular Communications or questions:**

[jvisas@state.gov](mailto:jvisas@state.gov).

This email address is to communicate nonemergency issues, questions, and concerns.

**For Further Information:**

Additional requirements that may apply to you are set forth in the Exchange Visitor Program Regulations. Review a copy of the current regulations and consult with your responsible officer.

**Secondary School Student Helpline**

1.866.283.9090

**Street Address:**

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
State Annex SA5,  
Fifth Floor  
Washington, DC 20522-0505

**Fax:** 202.632.2701

**Email:** [jvisas@state.gov](mailto:jvisas@state.gov)

**Required Notifications to Sponsors**

You must immediately inform your sponsor if you change your address (residence) or telephone number, or complete or withdraw from your exchange visitor program early. Doing so assists your sponsor in complying with their notification and reporting requirements to the U.S. Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security. Failure to keep your sponsor informed could result in the termination of your program status.

**Current Regulations**

The Exchange Visitor Program regulations are located in the Code of Federal Regulations (22 CFR, Part 62) and can be found at the J-1 Visa website: [jvisa.state.gov/sponsors/current/regulations-compliance](http://jvisa.state.gov/sponsors/current/regulations-compliance).

**Contacting the Department of State**

The Exchange Visitor Program is administered under the oversight of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Private Sector Exchange, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA).



**Appendix IV: YFU Office 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)

YFU After-Hours Emergency Line: 1.800.424.3691

Fax: 1.877.231.2681

Website: [yfuusa.org](http://yfuusa.org)

# Appendix V: Sample DS-2019 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: _____	<b>J-1</b>	
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: <b>Youth For Understanding USA, Inc.</b>				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 20004			
			Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer		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			
_____			_____			
Signature of Consular or Immigration Officer			Date (mm-dd-yyyy)			
THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE RESERVES THE RIGHT TO MAKE FINAL DETERMINATION REGARDING 212 (e).			Signature of Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer			
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 VI: Cell Phone Guide

**YFU knows that the key to every student's successful adjustment is frequent personal communication and interaction with host family and new friends in the host country. Peer communication among teens primarily occurs via cell phone and text message, and use of this technology is a key way for the YFU student to network with new American friends.**

YFU acknowledges that most students will bring with them or purchase a cell phone while on program. We must caution that cell phones, if used to maintain daily contact with friends and family in the home country, can affect a student's ability to adapt to the host environment and may jeopardize success on program. Any student who does have a cell phone must be aware of and follow YFU policies regarding contact with home country family and friends as outlined in the student handbook. Specifically, contact with the home country, to include phone calls and/or text messaging, should be limited to once per week. **If it is determined that cell phone use is interfering with cultural adjustment, YFU will support the host family enforcing restrictions on use.** YFU may also issue a warning or probation letter to the student regarding this issue.

### Needing a cell phone

Many families are shifting, if they have not already, from landlines to cellular phones. Therefore, the actual need for a cell phone will depend on whether your host family has a landline. If your family does not have a landline, then you will need a cell phone in case you need to be able to make an emergency call.

### Bringing your own cell phone

The only absolute way to make sure that your cell phone will work in the US is to check with your phone provider. If you have a GSM standard phone, make sure that you have the phone unlocked so that it can be used overseas and then make sure to purchase a SIM card in the US after settling down. If you own a CDMA device, you have to check to see whether or not it is non-global ready or global ready. Again, the only way to make sure your device will work while you are abroad is to check with your cell phone provider.

### Buying a cell phone in the US

Your host family should be able to help you get a prepaid phone if your own phone will not work in the US. Some stores where you can find a prepaid phone include Walmart, Target, BestBuy, Kmart, or even a cell phone provider store like Verizon Wireless or TMobile. Wherever you decide to buy your prepaid cell phone, keep in mind that you should never enter a contract for a cell phone with your host family.

### Students are Responsible for Costs of Cell Phones and Service

YFU recommends that host families not provide cell phones to their exchange students. If a host family chooses to provide a cell phone for a student who does not bring one or purchase one on their own, YFU advises that the host family not enter a cell phone contract for or with the student, but rather advise the student to purchase a prepaid phone. YFU will not assist in the resolution of a cell phone contract entered on behalf of the student.

The host family will be responsible for all unresolved contract charges or related costs incurred.

### Cell Phones at School

YFU students must familiarize themselves with their US high schools' policies regarding cell phone use on campus. Many US schools prohibit cell phone use on school property and will permanently dismiss any student found to be in violation of this rule. A YFU student who is dismissed from school will be considered for early return to the home country.

### Sexting

Sexting is a term referring to sending sexually explicit text messages, pictures or videos via cell phones or through the internet. The consequences of irresponsible "digital" behavior can be more public, more severe and longer lasting than mistakes people make "offline." Sending and/or receiving sexually explicit content to or from another person can lead to immediate disciplinary actions at school and within YFU. Depending on the circumstances, law enforcement may also become involved and criminal charges may be filed. To protect yourself, your friends, your host family and natural parents from such embarrassing and serious situations, you should never send or open a sexually explicit message.

### Harassing or Threatening Texts

Students should report to a host parent, teacher or their Local Coordinator if they are the target of harassing or threatening texts or phone calls. Students should never use cell phones to harass or threaten others. Students should be aware that such actions could result in criminal actions.

## Appendix VII: Computer Use and Internet Safety

Computer use and the internet are a part of everyday life and required by schools for research and homework. Laws and ethics surrounding computer and internet use vary from culture to culture and family to family. YFU USA hopes that the following guidelines can serve as a foundation for open discussion between host families and students. These ongoing discussions about appropriate computer use can prevent misuse throughout the exchange experience and keep the student and host family safe from the dangers of cyberspace.

- Many students will arrive with their own personal computer. They will be expected to follow host family rules on usage. Any rules should be communicated clearly to the student.
- Use of the host family computer or access to the internet is not a right. Students should be prepared for no access in the host family home or limited access at the host family home, at school, or at a public library.
- If granted permission to use the host family computer, the student must always respect the needs of others and set time limits, ask permission before adding programs, downloading materials from the internet, or opening email attachments.
- As excessive computer use has been shown to have a negative impact on host family relationships and overall adjustment, host families and YFU have the right to limit or suspend computer use.
- 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.
- Any file stored on the host family computer is not considered private. Students should not store anything on the host family computer that they would not wish to be viewed by host family members.
- Be aware of the danger of internet predators. Predators can become a threat when a student communicates with strangers over the internet. Never reveal personal information, such as school name, hometown, contact information, or pictures. Never agree to meet someone in person who you met in an internet chat room.
- Do not use violent, offensive, 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.
- Pictures or videos depicting nudity or sexual acts must never be viewed, downloaded, or sent 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 such files sent by friends.

### Recommendations to the Host Family

- Host parents are encouraged to discuss safe ways to use the internet with their students.
- Host parents or school personnel may choose to monitor their student's personal web pages and other internet use. Although such monitoring is common and legal in the US (if the activity is on a host family or school computer), it might be considered an invasion of privacy in many cultures. YFU requests that host parents always notify the student before checking computer activity.
- 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 National Office at [1.202.774.5200](tel:1.202.774.5200) with questions or concerns regarding this policy. Additional resources for parents and teens on this topic can be found at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children website: [missingkids.org](http://missingkids.org).

## Appendix VIII: Social Networking Safety Tips

Having a Snapchat or other social networking site profile (Instagram, X, Tiktok, etc.) is a good way to make plans with American friends and to keep in touch after going back to your home country. By following a few simple safety tips, you can very easily avoid creating problems for yourself and others.

### **Social media platforms are public**

The way you present yourself and your friends on your social media platforms can be seen by hundreds of people that you know and care about. Every time that you post something, decide whether you are representing yourself, your home country, family, YFU and host family well. Every year a few students lose their host family because of what they have posted on Facebook. Don't let this happen!!

### **“Friend” your host parents, host siblings and Local Coordinator**

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

### **Limit activity with your home country**

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 on your social media platforms.

### **Post pictures from your American life**

It's fun for others to see what you are doing and you will have a nice photo album to look back on when your exchange year is over.

### **Keep your profiles private**

Viewable only by people you know! You do not want to 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 or 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”. Again, 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**

Passing along rumors or unkind jokes or stories, or even false stories about someone on social networking sites is called cyber-bullying. 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 cyber-bullying.

### **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 yourself, your host family or your own parents.

### **Universities and employers are looking at social media platforms**

Keep in mind that 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 be viewing your social media platforms**

Any information contained in your social media platforms 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 anyone you don't know personally**

It's not rude to ignore friend requests from strangers. Have fun and stay safe!

# Appendix IX: Social Media Use While On Program

While social media is a part of daily life, YFU is an immersive, in-person experience. Being present and engaged in your host environment is essential. If social media use becomes disruptive, YFU or your Host Family may implement limits on phone or internet usage. Adhering to your Host Family's house rules and school policies on phone usage is a key expectation.

Your online actions reflect on you and YFU. Always remember that what you post online can have real-world consequences. You are accountable for your words, actions, and posts, whether positive or negative.

## Tips for Safe Social Media Use

### Share concerns

If something happens online that makes you uncomfortable or unsafe, speak to a trusted adult immediately.

### Protect privacy

Keep your personal information and that of others secure. Avoid using others' accounts or phones without permission.

### Avoid harmful content

Don't spread rumors, offensive jokes, or hurtful stories. What seems like a joke can be deeply hurtful to others.

### Think before posting

Once a photo, message, or video is shared, it's difficult to control its spread. Don't post when angry or upset.

### Report harmful content

Use social media platforms' reporting features for inappropriate content and block users if needed.

### Use privacy settings

Ensure only those you trust can see your posts and personal information.

### Be cautious

When accepting friend requests, check mutual connections and verify identities.

Don't feel obligated to accept random requests.

Trust your instincts: If something feels wrong online, talk to someone you trust for advice.

## Signs of Unhealthy Social Media Usage

- Disrupts daily responsibilities (school, work, friendships)
- Chosen over in-person interactions.
- Prevents getting at least 8 hours of sleep.
- Reduces time spent on physical activity.
- Continued use despite a desire to stop.
- Cravings to check social media frequently.
- Engaging in deceptive behavior to stay online.

### If you feel threatened or uncomfortable online, YFU is here to assist:

- Host Family: Your primary point of contact and support.
- Local Coordinator (LC): If your Host Family cannot help, contact your LC. They can escalate concerns to your Community Manager (CM) or Student Support Manager (SSM) if needed.
- YFU Emergency Line: Available 24/7 at 1.800.424.3691 for urgent issues.

Additionally, school counselors, teachers, or coaches can offer support. While you're encouraged to communicate with your Natural Parents, it's recommended to first work through local YFU support to avoid unnecessary stress.

- YFU is committed to your safety and well-being—don't hesitate to reach out for help