

AYA Handbook *for host families*



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Local Coordinator (LC) Name: _____

LC Home Phone: _____ LC Work Phone: _____

LC Cell Phone: _____ Email: _____

Student Support Specialist Name: _____

Student Support Specialist Phone: _____ Email: _____

Student Name: _____ ID# _____



Dear Friends, Welcome to AYA

We are very pleased that you have chosen to host an exchange student this year with Academic Year in America (AYA), a program of the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) Foundation.

You are about to begin a wonderful adventure in international exchange. As you come to know and love a new member of your family, you will share a very special intercultural experience that they will treasure always. At the same time, you will play a part in shaping the life of a young person from abroad, providing a rich opportunity that will be forever remembered.

AYA has developed this Handbook for families who are hosting for the first time or as a refresher for those who have already experienced this joy. We hope this guide helps to inform your expectations and to make the adjustment for your family and your student as smooth as possible.

AYA staff members, host families, Local Coordinators, and students, have all contributed suggestions to this guide. Please take the time to read through it and keep it within reach as a handy reference for times when you have specific questions.

We hope the year ahead will be filled with fun and learning for your entire family. Thank you for supporting our students and our program!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michele Kabel'.

Michele Kabel
Director, Academic Year in America

The AIFS Foundation

The Academic Year in America (AYA) program has been in operation since 1981 and is conducted under the auspices of the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) Foundation.

The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit educational organization founded in 1967 with the assistance of the late Robert F. Kennedy. Its mission is to promote worldwide understanding through cross-cultural exchange.

In addition to sponsoring the AYA program, the AIFS Foundation awards grants to high schools and individuals for projects that encourage intercultural awareness. A board of trustees that

includes prominent educators and international business leaders governs the Foundation. The board meets regularly to review the effectiveness and quality of the Foundation's AYA program to ensure adherence to standards of excellence.

The Foundation has been designated by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) as an Exchange Visitor Program authorized to issue the Form DS-2019, which enables qualified participants to apply for a J-1 exchange visitor visa from the nearest U.S. Consulate or Embassy.

Our Mission

AYA's mission is to encourage and inspire young people to become considerate, forward-thinking citizens of the world by creating dynamic educational opportunities to share beliefs, ideologies, and values across cultures. We are committed to providing these experiences with an unrivaled commitment to the safety of our students.

The AYA Program

The AYA program has been developed for high school students ages 15 to 18, from all parts of the world, who wish to spend a semester or full academic year studying in the United States while living with an American family. AYA chooses carefully screened teenagers who have a demonstrated ability in the English language, a solid academic record, and a positive attitude to participate on our program. While participating on the AYA program, students will improve their English and share a rewarding cross-cultural exchange experience with their host families, schools, and communities.

AYA students arrive in August for the 10-month full academic year or for the 5-month fall semester program, or in January for the 5-month spring semester program.

The Goals of the AYA Program are to:

- Increase understanding of the United States and its people, culture, and history among young people all over the world
- Encourage Americans to learn more about foreign countries, cultures, and languages
- Create opportunities for cross-cultural friendships
- Provide a solid educational experience for all participants in the program
- Cultivate compassion and global citizenship through the exchange of culture and ideas
- Deliver programs that are superior from both experiential and administrative perspectives

Key Players

AYA has several key players that make our program successful:

Students from around the world apply to participate in the AYA program. AYA students:

- Are between the ages of 15 and 18 and have a minimum of three years of English language study, a grade point average of C+ or better, and a passing score on an English language test
- Have different reasons for joining the program, but all have a desire to improve their English, curiosity about U.S. culture and customs, and the dream to be a high school student in the U.S. while living with an American host family
- Agree to adhere to the program rules
- Are fully insured and have their own spending money

Host families are **volunteers** of all ages, economic strata, and ethnic backgrounds. Host families have the following responsibilities:

- Provide the student with a safe and suitable home for the academic year or semester
- Welcome the student as a member of their family and encourage them to participate in all aspects of family life
- Provide the student with a bed, a quiet place to study and a safe and stable home environment. Students may have their own bedroom or may share with one other host sibling of similar age and gender
- Provide the student with all meals. Students who wish to purchase hot lunch at school instead of taking a bagged lunch from home are responsible for purchasing lunch themselves
- Assist the student with school registration, if necessary
- Encourage the exchange of ideas, values and traditions through open and respectful dialogue and shared experiences at home and within the community
- Provide the love, understanding and patience that a young person needs to enjoy a successful academic year in America



High schools, both private and public, accept our students.

- U.S. high schools embrace AYA students as members of their student bodies
- AYA students attend the local public high school serving the district in which their host family lives or a private school in the area
- Students enroll in full academic course-loads and are encouraged to participate, whenever possible, in activities such as band, sports, clubs, etc.
- Students must maintain a GPA equivalent to a C+ in all classes

Local Coordinators are the community representatives of the AYA program. They share a belief in the value of cross-cultural exchange. Local Coordinators are responsible for:

- Screening, interviewing, and selecting safe and suitable host families
- Enrolling students in local public or private high schools
- Providing host families with a pre-arrival orientation; providing students who do not attend AYA's national orientation with community orientation within two weeks of arrival
- Supervising and counseling families and students during the year; conducting face-to-face meetings and problem-solving
- Contacting both students and host families monthly via phone, email, video chat and/or in-person
- Making sure students are safe throughout the program
- Informing the National Office of any concerns
- Completing and submitting monthly student reports to AYA
- Answering questions and providing emergency assistance
- Relocating students locally to other homes if necessary
- Taking a student into their own home in the event of an emergency

Second Visitors are Local Coordinators or designated Sponsor Representatives who are responsible for:

- Visiting the host family home to check on the quality of the home within 30–60 days of a student's arrival
- Second visitors are independent of the Local Coordinator who

originally screened the home. These visitors serve as a 'second set of eyes', to confirm that the conditions of the home have not changed since the home interview

Regional Directors (RDs) are a team of individuals who work together to place and support our students, host families and Local Coordinators. Within the Regional Director team there are Placement Specialists and Student Support Specialists.

Placement Specialists work full time in our National Office. They are responsible for:

- Administering the program and overseeing the placement process within their territory of states
- Supervising Local Coordinators and communicating with overseas partners
- Working with Local Coordinators to finalize school enrollments; facilitating communication regarding arrival and departure times and logistics
- Assisting with student support when needed

Student Support Specialists are designated AYA employees who work full time in the National Office. Their purpose is to:

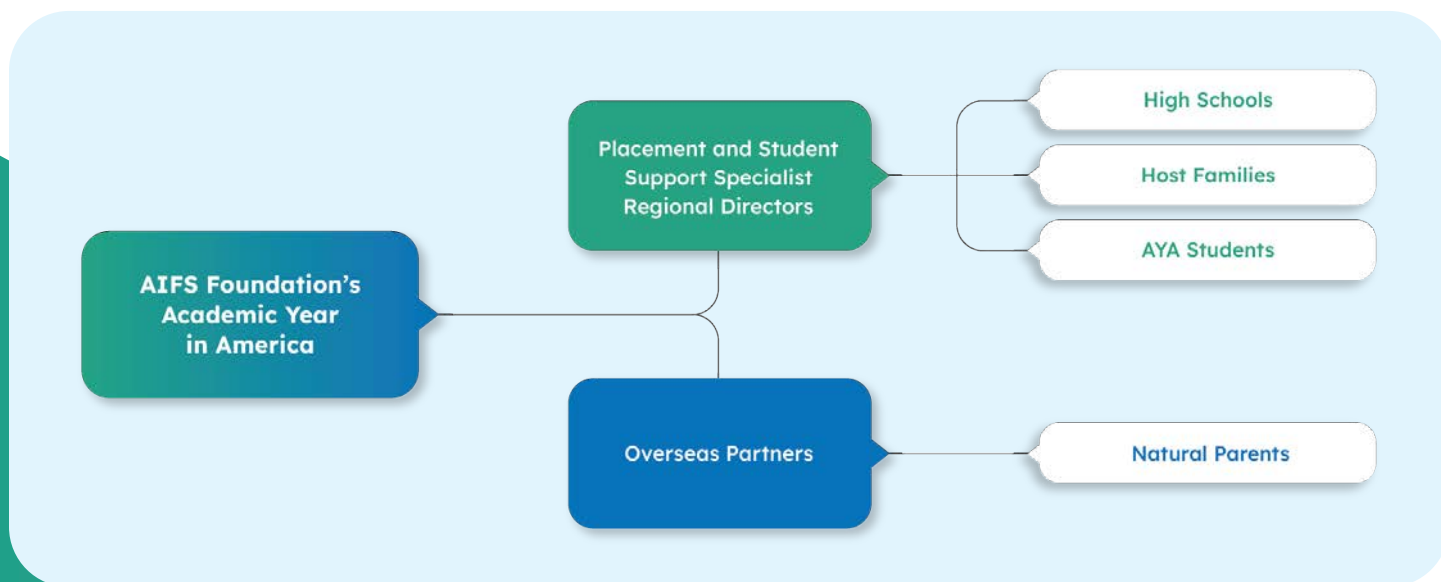
- Administer the program in specific states to provide on-program support for adjustment issues, rematch and the disciplinary process
- Provide outreach to students and serve as an additional outlet for students who need extra support or assistance
- Review quarterly student surveys and supervision reports submitted by each student's Local Coordinator

Overseas Partners are responsible for the initial selection and screening of our students, who come from over 45 countries from all around the world. The role of an overseas partner is to:

- Conduct personal interviews, administer English placement exams, and submit AYA applications
- Provide a pre-departure orientation and serve as liaisons to each student's natural parents during the program year
- Coordinate travel to and from the U.S.

AYA Organizational Chart

Our key players are shown on the AYA organizational chart below. We encourage the lines of communication to flow in this order. Please remember that host families are supported locally by the Local Coordinators and on a national level by the Student Support Specialists.



Welcoming Your Student

Once you have completed the screening process and selected your student, you will receive an email from the AYA compliance team letting you know that your placement has been confirmed and that you may begin contacting your student within 48 hours. Whether you have selected your student months or just a few weeks before their arrival, it's never too soon to begin your relationship. Early communication can be instrumental in starting the bonding process and help ease any jitters about this exciting new experience!

Once you have received notification that you may contact your student, you can send them an email, call them or schedule a chat or video chat session. Your student is undoubtedly very excited to hear from you, and this first contact is much anticipated! Early communication can include the following:

- A warm welcome to your student
- A brief introduction about your family to the student's natural parents
- Additional information about your family that was not covered in the host family application
- Local photos, postcards, brochures, newspapers, etc.

If your family chooses to call your student, be conscientious of the time difference. Be prepared to ask for your student by their native name, as a non-English-speaker may answer the phone. Remember that your student may be nervous and not expecting your call. Their English may be weak. Do not let this discourage your family.

Preparing for Your Student's Arrival

After communicating with your student and while awaiting their arrival, it is a good time to prepare a welcome package. Welcome packages can be an inexpensive but very thoughtful way to welcome your student to the family. Here are some suggestions to include:

- House keys
- Town map
- Welcome card
- Family photos, new photo album or scrapbook
- Address book with important addresses and numbers of family and friends
- Local emergency information
- Stationery or a journal
- Small gift set of American toiletries (shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, soaps, lotions, etc.)

Another step of pre-arrival preparation is the student's room. Here are things you should do to prepare the space:

- Make the student's bed with fresh linens
- Make space for the student's belongings in the closet and drawers
- Clear out boxes and stored items
- Frame photos of the student's natural family and your family to place in the room
- Place welcome package in room

Preparing Your Family

Hosting a student from a culture different from your own can be an exciting growth experience for your family. In order to maximize your experience, it is important to understand the ways in which cultural differences will have an impact on your family's life. The following exercises have been designed to assist your whole family in preparing for the hosting experience.

1. Share Goals for the Experience

Individually and as a family, you'll get a lot more out of the exciting adventure you are embarking on if everyone's expectations are clear. Families sometimes focus so hard on trying to help their exchange student have a wonderful experience that they forget to consider their own interests and wishes.

It's a good idea to think about your own values and expectations. Clarify them and share these thoughts as a family before your student arrives. Have each member of the family come up with two reasons why they want to host a student.

As a family, discuss how realistic you think these goals are and how you will feel if they are not met.

2. Learn about Your Student's Home Country

The more you know about the country and culture your student comes from, the better prepared you'll be to appreciate the differences in attitudes and behavior you encounter.

While many of our host families often conclude that "teenagers are teenagers" and "people are people all over the world," chances are your student's perspective and behavior will differ from yours in many ways. All people have been molded by cultural influences. You must be open to understanding and respecting the differences you encounter. The amount your family will grow and gain will depend in part on how much effort you put into the discovery.

Your student will be trying to cope with many unfamiliar American customs and may find it hard to let you know when and/or what they do not understand. If you ask questions about your student's country and culture, you'll make it easier for your student to ask you questions. It's good to express your interest in learning something about your exchange student's native land. Start this pattern of interaction within the first several days.

It isn't always easy to think of what to ask. Here is an exercise you can do now—individually or as a family—that will help you get a head start on the process.

Focus your thoughts on the country your student is coming from. Take one minute to write down the words or phrases that come to mind. Jot down as many as you can. Look over your list. Pick two or three things about which you are curious. Come up with as many questions as you can about them to ask your student. For example: If you are expecting a Chinese student, chopsticks might be on your list. Some questions the idea of chopsticks might trigger are:

- Do Chinese people ever use knives and forks—what if they go to an American- or European-style restaurant?

- Do you have ethnic restaurants in China? If so, what kind?
- How often does your family eat in restaurants?
- Is the Chinese meal schedule like ours?

3. Think about Cultural Differences

Dealing with cultural differences is part of the challenge of the exchange program. Understanding them is the reward. Pick one important cultural difference. Picture yourself living in your student's home country and imagine what you would find strange about life in your new home or school because of that single difference. Can your family come up with some specific ways to help your student adjust to the many cultural differences they will encounter?

For example: What if your student tells you prior to their arrival that it is customary for people in their culture to arrive late to social engagements. Imagine that there is an upcoming event that is important to you, and determine, with your family, the best ways to discuss the difference in the "time" concept. Make very clear the actual time you want your student to be ready. It's important to remember that situations like the above may occur more often than just once.



Adjusting to Life in America

Culture Shock

Culture shock is the reaction of the mind and the body to overwhelming change. It is never through one event or happening, but through a continuous succession of events, where definite patterns of behavior are disrupted and the individual feels a loss of the known and the familiar. The symptoms vary greatly, but usually include:

- Apparent (and often real) exhaustion
- Either insomnia or too much sleep
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anger (particularly at everything foreign)
- Withdrawal
- Homesickness
- Idealization of everything at home; critical of all things foreign
- Change in eating patterns; either weight loss or gain

By anticipating some of these symptoms and reactions, you can help your student realize that they are normal and usually temporary. Culture shock can set in at any time, but often appears after the “newness” has worn off and around holidays, when the student is feeling far away from the familiar customs and traditions of home.



The Ups and Downs

It is important to understand the symptoms that culture shock may present and that while many of our students experience similar patterns of culture shock, it can set in at any time during the program year.

Some students may experience more intense culture shock, lasting longer than others, but in general, expect the year to go like this:

- Initially, students are the center of attention, and everything is new. Excitement runs high. Once the thrill is over, routine sets in. During the 2nd to 4th months your student may feel like another member of the family. They are adjusting better and more quickly to family life in the United States, and you may find that they are communicating more openly and frequently with you. With this wonderful level of comfort, challenges may also arise. You may notice that your student is testing boundaries, rules, and expectations that have already been set in place. This is not uncommon for all teenagers to do—but it is important to remind the student of the expectations that you have all discussed and agreed to. Extra patience and guidance will help students learn and adapt.
- **Around mid-stay** (the time the holidays arrive for 10-month students), there is a general malaise, homesickness, and sometimes sadness, which signifies that the student is a bit worn out by it all. These feelings can be exacerbated by the holidays. While the holidays are an exciting and new experience, it can also prove to be a stressful period for our AYA students and host families. Some of our students begin to miss their families back home, especially when you may have so many of your family members around during holiday times.
- **Spring** reverses most of this. Students realize their time here is limited; they want to make the most of it. Most students have now adapted, and they make friends more easily and get involved in more activities and relationships.
- **As the program nears its end**, the student usually feels comfortable. Adjustments have made the strange familiar, and open communication through the low points earlier in the year will help you and your student through to the end of the year. At the end of the year, some students may become more inclined to break rules, as they know that they will be returning home soon. It is important to review expectations and house rules as well as Program Rules with your student to ensure a smooth transition into the final couple of months of the program.
- The same holds true for semester students, except time is condensed to five months. Remember, open communication and patience are key to a successful cultural exchange.

Cultural Iceberg

An iceberg is a common analogy used to explain the complexity of culture. Cultural differences can be very straightforward, such as language and food, but other differences take time to identify. It is the differences that are “below the surface” that can sometimes cause issues between students and host families. A good example of this is style of communication. Americans tend to be very polite and diplomatic in our communication. Generally, we say what we mean, but we try to find the nicest way possible to say it. By comparison, German communication style is very direct and to the point, which can be interpreted as abrupt or even rude by American standards.

When welcoming a student into your home, we urge host families to learn about their student’s home country and culture to help identify cultural differences and take them into consideration throughout the adjustment cycle. As hosts it is important to try to identify what is ‘below the surface’ as you get to know your student and develop an understanding of what cultural values and norms might be influencing their behavior, communication style, or attitudes. Likewise, it is important to consider your own values and cultural norms, and how they might influence your interactions with your exchange student. Always remember, when it comes to other cultures, it’s not better or worse, it’s just different!



General Expectations

Most of us make assumptions based on what we've heard or read about people from another country. This is natural; and while some of those stereotypes may **sometimes** be correct, many probably won't be. One thing is certain: your student and your experience will be different from what you imagine! Keep your expectations flexible and keep your sense of humor. Don't let preconceived notions about what you thought your experience was going to be like keep you from enjoying the real person and the real experience.

Student Expectations

Upon arriving to the U.S., some students have exaggerated or unrealistic expectations about what the U.S. or your family is going to be like. Students may expect their host family to come straight off the set of an American movie; they may expect life to be a version of their favorite TV shows or movies. They may expect unrestricted freedom and opportunity in this storybook country they've heard so much about. Instead, they may find working moms and dads making ends meet, host brothers and sisters with after-school jobs, or families that take pleasure in a pizza on Friday night and a church supper on Sunday. They discover that raking leaves, taking out the trash and doing their own laundry are a regular part of American life, and that the quiet times at home with their host family are the most meaningful moments they will experience in the U.S. They come to love it, but it's often not what they expected.

Host Family Expectations

Host families will also have certain expectations about how their student will behave, how they will fit into their family, and how the year will be overall. They may expect a student to cook exotic dishes from their homeland; and to be endlessly fascinating, exciting, and enthusiastic. Instead, they may receive a student whose bedroom is a mess, who leaves dishes in the sink, and whose feet end up on the coffee table. Just like teenagers all over the world, your student will probably spend a lot of time on social media and electronic devices, sleep late and miss the bus, feel homesick one day and overconfident the next. It's important to remember that these students, though from other countries, are still teenagers and will

exhibit behaviors and attitudes common to most individuals of this age group. For most families, it will take time to build rapport and comfortably adjust to your new family member - but it's worth it! As the relationship develops, host families grow to love and accept this unique teenager as their own.

Adjusting Expectations

The success of the exchange experience depends on how quickly and how readily both student and family can adjust expectations to accept and enjoy reality. When dealing with cultural differences, remember: it's not right, it's not wrong, it's just different.

Many of the issues you may encounter will be a result of unmet expectations. AYA reminds all of our students and host families that open communication and problem-solving are the best ways to address and overcome issues, big or small. Successful placements are not always the ones that are problem-free. The deep connection and goodwill that develop through adaptation and respect for cultural differences will strengthen your relationship with your student and help you to grow as an individual and as a family.

Unmet expectations for both you and your student can create frustration, which over time can create long-standing issues. By setting up clear expectations and guidelines and listening to each other, you and your student can reconcile these differences, if not prevent them altogether!

Skip the Honeymoon

The sooner you set clear and precise rules and expectations with your student, the easier adjustment will be. Many families inadvertently make the mistake of giving the student too much time to "settle in" before setting expectations. While well intended, this results in students establishing habits and/or patterns of behavior that are not in line with your expectations as hosts which can create tension and misunderstandings as time goes on. For example, a family may wish to overlook the fact that a student does not turn the lights off when they leave a room, assuming that after a few days or weeks, the student will figure out that the host family wants the lights off when not in use. When the student doesn't eventually 'figure this out', because it hasn't been explicitly stated, it can lead to frustration and resentment on the part of the host family. This is why we say "skip the honeymoon!" Avoid the urge to be overly permissive or censor yourself in an effort to make the student feel comfortable at first. Instead, be upfront about what you expect so that the student has the opportunity to build positive habits that align with your family's routines and values.

With this in mind, AYA has developed a comprehensive Expectations Worksheet for you to fill out with your student when they arrive. We encourage you to sit down together as a family, within 72 hours of your student's arrival. Completing this worksheet together will give all parties the opportunity to clarify expectations and ask questions, and it may reveal some cultural





differences early on that can be addressed immediately. AYA has found that families who complete this exercise early have fewer miscommunications than those who choose not to complete this exercise.

After completing the worksheet, it is important that you thoroughly review it with your student and allow them the opportunity to process the information and ask questions. AYA suggests that you make copies of this worksheet and post it in central locations so that both you and your student can be reminded of the guidelines that you established together.

They Remember, adjusting expectations is the key to success. Don't be afraid to add or amend expectations as you go—just be certain that everyone is aware of the changes! You may find it beneficial to review expectations during key points in the program year—for example, during the holidays, mid-way through, or during times of the year when events such as graduation parties and prom are a fixture. Your student may need to be reminded of household rules and what is expected of him/her as a family member when external activities become a larger part of their experience.

Attitude

Sometimes, you feel your student has the wrong attitude. Stereotypically, teenagers are naturally critical and may question something many times. An exchange student may be particularly critical, especially when feeling homesick or experiencing culture shock. “It’s better at home” and “Americans are so hard to understand” are common refrains and part of cultural adjustment.

Remind your student that this exchange aims to experience another culture and that you will do your best to help. By keeping an open mind, your student can expect to adapt to new ways of life and recognize the value of the exchange experience. Give them the opportunity to work through these feelings, and if they persist, take the opportunity to provide compassion and support; this will go a long way towards building trust between you and your student. It will take time for students to get settled; some students may appear to adjust quickly and then regress a few weeks or even months later – this is all normal. One more bit of advice – don’t take anything personally! We know this is easier said than done, but remember to always contact your Local Coordinator for support or guidance when needed!

Food

Your responsibility as host parents is to provide an adequate, balanced diet, including three nutritious meals a day. If a student wishes to purchase hot lunch at school they are responsible for paying for it, otherwise the student will bring a packed lunch from the food you have provided at home. If you go out to eat as a family, you are expected to pay for the student, as you would any other member of your family. However, if the student is out socially with friends, the student is responsible for purchasing meals during that time. Your student may be accustomed to different food at home, which means they may take some time to adjust to your family’s diet and American food altogether. Offer them a range of food – they may grow to love some of the foods that initially intimidated them. Find out in the first few days if there are foods that your student cannot eat due to specific dietary restrictions, allergies, or religious reasons. Beyond this, however, you should just prepare your usual meals. Be patient with your student and encourage them to try new things.

Host families, especially those in which there are no teenagers, are sometimes amazed by the quantity of food exchange students consume. It’s important to remember that growing teens of any culture require a lot of nourishment to maintain their energy levels. Ensure that your student has had enough to eat and be sure to discuss the protocol for asking for more food, snacking between meals, and eating after dinner.

Your student is now a part of your family and it will be important for you to discuss with them the types of snacks your family eats, where food is stored, and what time your family eats meals.

It’s also important to be aware that eating habits can change or fluctuate as a result of culture shock or homesickness; students may eat more or less than usual during these times. If you suspect this is the case, talk about it with your student; talking is a great way to address adjustment issues and open a dialogue about healthy eating habits. Some students may be concerned that they are going to gain weight in the U.S., which may influence some of their dietary choices. It’s important to

remind your student that maintaining a balance of a healthy diet and exercise is the best way to stay healthy, while still enjoying food and trying new things. If you feel that your student’s eating habits are affecting their overall health, it is important that you contact your Local Coordinator right away so that they can work with you and the National Office to ensure that your student remains healthy on the program.

High School

Successful participation at an American high school is every bit as important as being part of an American family.

Our students and their natural parents are made aware that AYA does not guarantee grade assignments, a diploma, participation in graduation ceremonies, or participation in sports. Students or host families should not pressure a school to place an AYA student in a particular grade or to allow them to graduate. Students can be issued a guidance or advisory letter or be placed on probation if they make persistent requests to graduate, change grade placement, adjust their schedule, or participate in certain activities after the school has made their position clear.

It is important to encourage your student to take school seriously. This year may not count for academic credit at home, but this is an academic program and one of the requirements is that students make sincere commitment to doing their best at school. AYA requires each student to achieve at least a “C+” average in every class (we allow the first quarter for settling in) and demonstrate a positive attitude in school.

Going to a new school is difficult for any teenager. Attending a new school in a foreign country, communicating all day in a foreign language, and experiencing different ways of doing things can be even more difficult. If possible, spend a few hours with your student visiting school before it opens. Introduce your student to the principal and to the appointed guidance counselor. Explain the role of the guidance counselor, since this may be a support person not known in a school abroad.

Every student has a different learning curve, and some students may take more time than others to get adjusted to their new school. Remember, your student will now have the unique and challenging experience of having all of their classes taught in English without a lifeline to their native language. Depending on what type of English language instruction they have received, some students may adjust more quickly than others. For example, German students who have spent a lot of time speaking and hearing the English language may be more comfortable in the first weeks of school than students from China or Thailand, who have been studying English as a written language. It typically takes 8-12 weeks for a student to develop confidence in their language skills. Students who continue to struggle with language or grades after the adjustment period will be counseled appropriately; AYA may suggest private tutoring for those who need it. Students are responsible for all costs associated with private tutoring. If an AYA student is not taking advantage of academic outlets intended to help them improve, the appropriate guidance measures will be taken to emphasize the importance of academics while on this program and the potential disciplinary consequences of consistent poor academic performance, effort, and attitude.

In the unlikely event that your student experiences academic or behavioral difficulties at school, AYA will work with you and your Local Coordinator to provide support and corrective guidance, including disciplinary action, if necessary. Except in the case of school expulsion, which is grounds for immediate dismissal from the program, all other issues will be evaluated and reviewed by AYA's disciplinary committee. If you are concerned about your student's performance at school, please inform your Local Coordinator.

After-School Activities & Sports

AYA encourages all students to become an active member of the student body, either through sports, clubs, or extracurricular activities. AYA does not guarantee that all students will be eligible to play sports at their local high school; eligibility is based on each high school's individual policy on foreign exchange students and athletic participation. Some districts prohibit exchange students from participating in sports, and some schools require physicals performed by a doctor in America to be conducted prior to agreeing to allow students to participate in sports. Students are responsible for covering the cost of any required physicals and athletic fees. For students who are unable to play sports, AYA encourages them to find other local athletic intramural teams or join other clubs and activities. School activities are an excellent way for students to make friends with American peers who share common interests. It is important that host families encourage students to become involved, as it will help them grow, socialize, and round out their experience in the U.S. Encourage your student to try several new activities or sports, even if they are unsure that they will like them.

Transportation to and from Activities

Keeping up with a busy teenager can be challenging! AYA understands that each host family has its own busy schedule and since AYA students are not allowed to drive in the U.S., adding another person to the transportation schedule may be challenging. It is important that you set expectations about transportation and how rides will be provided as soon as your student arrives. Let your student know what your schedule is and what your availability is to provide transportation. You may need to work with your student to identify a carpool or other sources of transportation. Make sure that you let your student know how far in advance you need to be notified of the need for a ride; it may help to create a weekly or monthly family schedule so that there are no surprises! It is not your responsibility to provide rides to all your student's social activities; talk with your Local Coordinator if you need assistance with planning alternative arrangements. Please also note that students are not allowed to use ride sharing services such as Lyft or Uber without a host parent or a responsible and trusted adult in the vehicle.

Digital Devices and Social Media

It is important to understand that digital communication is a universal part of teen culture, so working with your student on how to manage device usage can create a happy and healthy balance of screen time and family time.

While video chatting, messaging, and emailing are excellent ways for your student to keep in touch with family and friends back home, communications abroad should be limited to a **reasonable** amount. A student gains most by interacting with their host family and local friends. Experience has shown that limited contact with the student's home country will minimize homesickness. You should set rules about how much time is allotted, what sites are acceptable to view, when or if the student is allowed to download online content, and any other specific computer guidelines you wish your student to follow.

While it is up to your family to determine guidelines for computer or phone usage, it is important to also pay attention to how your student is adjusting when setting these boundaries; you may choose to readjust them. If a student is able to communicate frequently with family and friends back home while maintaining healthy relationships with your host family, doing well in school, and being active and engaged in his or her experience, there is no reason to limit their technology usage. Conversely, if you notice that your student's frequent communication with friends and family back home is hindering their adjustment and causing them to become more withdrawn or homesick, it may be time to set firm boundaries and limits on device time to help them with adjustment. Call your Local Coordinator, or AYA Student Support Specialist if you need guidance or suggestions on how to proceed with setting guidelines for communication.

Remember, all students must have reasonable access to phone and/or internet to get in touch with their natural parents, their Local Coordinator, or the AYA office at all times.



Friends

Making friends is an important part of this experience for students. Setting realistic expectations for friendships while on this program is a great start to helping with feelings of nervousness or anxiety. Explain to your student that they may not form deep friendships like the ones they had at home right away, but they will still be able to develop new connections and rapport through group activities and outings. Remind your student that it takes time and effort to form a meaningful connection with new friends.

When your student starts to form friendships, be sure that they understand your family's rules about inviting friends over, visiting friends' homes, and riding in cars with friends. You want your student to follow your family guidelines but still be able to enjoy time with friends.

Your student may also need to be reminded that some American high school students might not be well informed about what's going on in other parts of the world. American students may show little or no interest in different cultures due to lack of exposure. Exchange students may be surprised by some of the questions their new friends ask. Remember, one of the reasons U.S. high schools enroll exchange students is to enhance their own student body's global competency by giving American students the opportunity to learn about other cultures, languages and values systems. Remind your student that part of their role here is to be an ambassador for their country and to teach others about their culture.

Dating

Students must follow all host family rules regarding dating. AYA highly discourages our students from entering a romantic relationship while on-program. Dating is not the purpose of this exchange and has the potential to derail an otherwise positive experience by narrowing the student's focus and preventing them from experiencing a wide range of social activities with other friends and their host family. AYA encourages you to set expectations about dating shortly after your student arrives. Many students choose to go out in groups or participate in casual, activity-based dating (going to prom, homecoming, etc.).

Sex

Sexual intercourse is prohibited while students are on the AYA program. Sexual relationships have the potential to undermine program objectives and distract students from their goals. In addition, sexual activity can be a risky behavior exposing students to unwanted consequences and potentially dangerous situations which we wish to limit the possibility of.

Curfew

AYA Students must follow the host family's rules about curfew at all times. Keep in mind, curfew is a new principle for many exchange students, and they may need to be reminded about the specific time they need to return home before they leave the house.

Loss of Independence

You may find that your student is confused or frustrated by some of your household rules related to curfew, dating, or socializing with friends. In many other countries and cultures teens have far more independence than American teens. In many European or Latin American countries, it is completely normal for teens to go to clubs, drink alcohol, and stay out without restrictions.

AYA has prepared our students for the vast difference in the way that many American teenagers are parented and the loss of independence that they may experience. Despite being prepared for this, when first given new rules, some exchange students equate curfew or other restrictions with a lack of trust, which can be more difficult to accept than the actual rules themselves. It is important to explain that you are building trust together and remind them that they are in a new country and your rules are intended to keep them safe!

The other way in which students may suffer a loss of independence is their newfound dependence on rides for transportation. Many students are used to getting around their hometowns on public transportation or a bicycle without having to rely on anyone else. Getting used to asking for rides and permission to go places can be a difficult adjustment. Keep this in mind when your student starts making friends and scheduling activities and help them create a schedule with transportation well in advance.

Religious Beliefs

As church is often an important part of family life in the U.S., students are encouraged to partake in church activities with their host family, but they must not be required to attend. You should discuss this with your student upon arrival to find out if they wish to attend your church and how often. AYA emphasizes the value of sharing the social aspect of religion with your student and reminds all host families that students should not be asked to share the same beliefs or ideologies as their host family. Students who wish to attend religious services different from your own must be provided with transportation to and from services, if necessary.

Student Travel

Traveling During the Program

The primary purpose of the AYA program is for students to learn about American culture through a home stay and high school experience while sharing their own culture with others. AYA encourages host families to introduce students to local attractions and take them to community events, but does not expect you to plan travel adventures for them.

Recreational traveling is discouraged while school is in session, but may occur with prior approval from the school and AYA. When the opportunity to travel does arise, AYA allows students to travel with their host family or Local Coordinator without any special restrictions (except if travelling abroad) other than informing the AYA office of their whereabouts. However, if a student is planning a trip with someone other than their host parents or LC, or would like to attend a school-sponsored overnight trip, the student must submit an official Travel Request which includes information about the proposed travel plans, dates and



signatures confirming that the student has received permission from your family as well as their natural family to submit the request. **Under no circumstances will AYA approve a trip that is not adequately supervised by an approved adult who is 25 years or older.** All adult chaperones must be listed on the Travel Request and approved by AYA. In some cases, chaperones will be asked to complete a criminal background check prior to approval. Whenever possible, Travel Requests must be submitted at least four weeks prior to the planned trip. Final approval for all independent travel is granted by AYA. Students may not book any travel arrangements until they have received approval from the AYA office. Students who are not approved for travel and have booked travel will not be reimbursed for any resulting cancellation fees and may be subject to disciplinary action.

Family Vacations

Host families who wish to take their student on vacation may request that they pay for airfare and vacation-related expenses that do not include food or gas. If a student is not able to join a family on vacation for financial reasons, your Local Coordinator will work with you to find alternate housing during that time.

Traveling Abroad

If you plan to travel outside the U.S. with your student during the program year, the student will need to submit all proposed travel plans to AYA for review at least **6 weeks** prior to your trip. With support from their host family or Local Coordinator, it's the student's responsibility to obtain and submit the necessary information and documents before traveling. If the appropriate

paperwork is not obtained in time, there is a possibility that the student may not be allowed leave or re-enter the U.S.

Here are the initial steps to complete:

- Check the student's J-1 Visa inside their passport for an "M" stamped in the "Entries" block. If an "M" is stamped there, this indicates that it is a multiple entry visa, which will allow the student to successfully leave and re-enter the United States.
- Contact the nearest consulate of the country to which you are traveling to find out if additional documents (i.e. visa) are required for travel. Some countries require additional paperwork for minors traveling without one or both legal guardians. If this is the case, the student's parents will need to provide the necessary authorization well in advance of travel.
- The student's DS-2019 form must be 'endorsed' or signed by the AYA office for at least 6 weeks prior to the intended travel date. This can be done electronically, but is a critical step, and the student will not be able to travel if their DS-2019 form is not signed by AYA's Responsible or Alternate Responsible Program Officer. Please send an email to your Regional Director including the details of your proposed travel and a scan or high quality photo of your student's form.
- Make sure that your student has their printed and validated DS-2019 form and passport on the day of travel. Without these documents your student will not be allowed to travel outside of the U.S.
- Make copies of all documents before turning them over to a consulate and traveling.

Traveling During School Breaks

Host families are not required or expected to travel with their students during holidays or school breaks. Students should plan to spend free time and holidays at home with their host family and in the community.

If, however, your student would like the opportunity to sightsee or travel during a school vacation, there may be short-term trip opportunities with an approved tour operator, Belo Tours. Belo Tours provides safe, short-term travel opportunities for high school students.

Some schools may organize spring break or holiday trips. AYA students may only attend spring break or holiday trips if they are sponsored by the school and appropriately chaperoned by school staff, and approved by all responsible parties. Spring break trips with a group of friends will not be approved.

To avoid disappointment, students and families should avoid focusing on recreational travel, as that is not the purpose of the AYA program.

Please be aware that these steps are only the basic requirements for traveling abroad. Traveling parties are responsible for determining all requirements and cost for travel. It is possible for your student to be denied access to another country. This decision is solely at the discretion of each country's consulate.

Most cruise line itineraries will take you into other countries; in these cases, all of the above applies, just as with any other form of travel. Please note the process for traveling abroad differs slightly for FLEX and YES students. Please contact your Regional Director at least 2 months prior to your trip to begin the approval process.

Contact with Friends and Family from Home

Communication

Students are encouraged to limit contact with natural family and friends back home to a *reasonable* amount. Reasonable will be defined by you and your student depending on how they are adjusting to your family and the exchange experience. As mentioned in the digital device and social media section, some students are able to speak with their parents or friends a few times a week while engaging actively in the exchange experience and bonding with their host family. For these students, it is not necessary to restrict communication. Some students, however, may struggle with adjustment, and you may find that frequent communication with family and friends back home is hindering your student's ability to engage in the program and bond with your family. In these cases, it may be prudent to limit contact to once a week until the student becomes more engaged.

Visits from family and friends

Students are not permitted to visit with family or friends from home during the program year. Students may not return home for holidays or special occasion or vice versa. The reason is simple: Our experience has shown us that visits to or from home can be very disruptive to a student's year in America and can lead to difficulties adjusting, which can exacerbate or trigger feelings of extreme homesickness. Visits from natural family are permitted at the end of the program year. The "end" of the year is defined as after April 15th for full year and January/ spring semester students and December 1st for August/Fall semester students. AYA advises students and natural families to discuss any potential visits with your family well in advance of booking travel to ensure that you are comfortable with the visit, and that the timing does not conflict with any scheduled plans your family may already have. Visitors are advised to secure accommodations at a nearby hotel, unless explicitly invited by the host family to do otherwise.

Emergency Return Travel

In rare cases a student may need to return home for a few days or a week due to the death or serious illness of a family member. If all parties agree that it is in the student's best interest to return to the U.S. after the visit, AYA will work with the student's overseas agency to arrange travel.





Money and Banking

etc.). Grant students (YES and FLEX) receive special funding for personal expenses. Some students arrive with spending money for the year, while others receive monthly or periodic allowances. Your student is responsible for using their own money to purchase clothing, recreational items, social expenses, school fees, sports related fees, etc. Students may bring their own credit or debit card, or you can inquire with local banks to see if your student can open their own account, which should in now way be connected to your own.

Before the student arrives, check with your local banks to determine which bank can receive international cable transfers of money from overseas banks, and the standard procedure for clearing international checks or money orders. Not all banks are equipped to provide these services, and procedures vary from bank to bank.

No matter how the student receives or has access to money while on program, the student's money should never be placed in the host family's account. Student and host family finances should be kept separate at all times. Help your student stay safe by reminding them to keep their cash and/or bank cards in a secure location and to never share their P.I.N or allow anyone else to use their credit or debit cards.

Students are not permitted to give or lend their host family money for any reason. Likewise, if you find that your student is running low on funds or not budgeting properly, you should avoid lending your student money. Instead, contact your Local Coordinator, who will work with the National Office to ensure that the student's parents are providing the student with adequate funds to cover their personal expenses.

Clearly discuss with your student what you expect them to be responsible for regarding trips and weekly entertainment. You should not pay for anything in the beginning of the year that you do not intend to continue to pay for throughout the year, as this may confuse expectations and create unnecessary tension later in the year.

Driving

Students are not permitted to drive a car or any other motorized vehicle while on-program. Examples include but are not limited to, ATVs, boats, and motorcycles. Even with permission from a host parent, operating any vehicle is considered a breach of program rules. We understand that this may be disappointing for some students and families, however certain activities carry increased liability and may not be covered by their insurance, and are restricted for the purpose of minimizing unnecessary risk to all involved.

Illness, Medical Emergencies, and Insurance

If your student requires medical attention while on-program, they are covered by insurance and will be able to visit a doctor and/or receive urgent care in many area hospitals and urgent care facilities. If necessary, you and/or your Local Coordinator will be able to sign off any urgent care that your student needs. This authorization has been granted by the student's parents, who signed a medical authorization release form allowing authorized representatives of AYA to make emergent medical decisions on a student's behalf. The medical authorization form is included in your student's application **which can be accessed through your host family portal.**

In the event of a serious accident or illness, AYA student support staff will assist and work with the student's insurance and emergency assistance company to ensure that they are able to receive the support and care needed to safely recover. In rare cases, students may need to return home to receive follow-up care or surgery in their home countries and in the care of their natural parents.

Insurance

All AYA students have medical and accident insurance through AYA or their sponsoring agency. Students will receive an insurance card and a brochure detailing the policy coverage prior to or upon arrival in the U.S. AYA Students also receive ID cards that have the student's policy number and host family and LC contact information, along with AYA's 24 hr emergency number in case of an emergency.

For detailed information on coverage, please refer to the student's individual insurance plan and insurance resources information from AYA, which is sent to you prior to your student's arrival and will also be available on your AYA host family portal.

Most insurance plans do not cover pre-existing conditions, routine physicals or eye exams, immunizations, or injuries sustained from participation in extreme sports or activities. Activities that are usually not covered by insurance include but are not limited to: boxing, combat sports, aerial, sports, rock climbing, hang gliding, parachuting, bungee jumping, horse racing, scuba diving, white water rafting, jet skiing, water skiing, heli-skiing, ATV driving or riding.

It is the student's responsibility to know what is covered and what is excluded under their insurance plan. If you or your student are uncertain about whether an activity or sport is covered by insurance, please contact their provider or AYA for clarification prior to participation.

Submitting Claims

Students are instructed to refer to their individual policy for instructions on how to submit a claim. Depending on the provider, students may need to make direct payments to the attending medical facilities and then submit their bills to the insurance provider for reimbursement. Students should keep copies of all bills they pay and forward them to their natural parents to ensure that expenses are reimbursed, and bills are paid in a timely manner. It is important that the Local Coordinator, host family and student understand the claims process for a student's insurance provider. A basic summary of each policy will be sent to each host family prior to the student's arrival.

Insurance is confusing for students! AYA suggests sitting with your student and reviewing their insurance plan, including co-pay and claims procedures to ensure that they are making sound decisions about medical care. AYA advises that you contact your student's insurance provider to identify in-network physicians and urgent care centers in your area whenever possible. Emergency room visits should be reserved for true emergencies only. If your student goes to a doctor or urgent care network that is not in their insurance network, they may have to pay additional charges. If you or your student are in doubt about what is covered by insurance, contact AYA during business hours or contact the student's insurance provider directly for clarification.

Host parents are not financially responsible for medical treatment. To keep things streamlined, please ensure that your student provides their natural family's name and contact information on all guarantor forms for collection. If the medical provider requires a US address for a guarantor, you may use AYA's office address, 1 High Ridge Park, Stamford, CT, 06905.



Host Family Orientation

Participating in a host family orientation is an excellent opportunity to learn about the program, ask questions, and prepare for your student's arrival. Your Local Coordinator is responsible for providing you with

a host family orientation in your community before your student arrives. You may also view AYA's host family orientation using the link provided in your host family confirmation email or by visiting your host family portal.

The AYA host family orientation will cover the following information:

- Overview of AYA
- Responsibilities of an AYA host family
- Responsibilities of an AYA student
- Responsibilities of an AYA Local Coordinator
- Keeping your student safe and AYA's student safety video
- High school and your student
- The AYA student disciplinary process
- End of year

Note: Whether this is your first-time hosting or you are an experienced repeat host family, you must participate in a host family orientation annually. This is a federal requirement and very important, as program regulations change and information is refreshed each season.

Helpful Hints for Host Families

- Your student may be nervous and overwhelmed when they first get to your community. Give them a few days to adjust, settle in, and recoup from jet lag.
- Do not assume that your student is unhappy or uninterested if they seem quiet, tired, or introverted. Most need time to rest, sleep, and be alone after first arriving.
- Students may speak English well, but are not accustomed to hearing the local brand spoken. Speak slowly and clearly, and try to avoid idioms.
- Students from Asian countries may need more time to adjust to speaking the English language. Different education systems teach the English language in different ways. In Asia, English is taught predominantly as a written language; therefore, some Asian students need a few extra weeks to adjust to hearing and speaking the language before becoming proficient.
- Writing things down can be helpful in the first few weeks. It is important to give advance warning for upcoming events such as mealtimes, time to leave, etc.
- It is helpful and reassuring for you to show a real interest in the natural family. Get to know the names of your student's brothers and sisters and parents. Display their family pictures along with your own.
- School may be difficult at first. Ask each evening if your student needs help. . If a class is getting too challenging, give your Local Coordinator a call so that they can help.
- The happiest families are flexible enough to realize that 17 or 18 years of cultural learning and personal habits will not be changed quickly. Remember that many things are not right or wrong, but different. Give your student time to learn your house rules, and be patient when they make a few mistakes here and there.
- Be honest and direct with your student. If there are small problems, address them before they get bigger. Open communication is very important.
- **Resist the temptation to overlook minor problems or resolve them without the assistance of your Local Coordinator.** It is very important to make sure that your Local Coordinator is aware of issues big or small as soon as they occur. Your Local Coordinator is trained to help support you and your student. Your Local Coordinator is also responsible for documenting any issues in case they escalate or require intervention from the National Office.
- Remember that a new relationship is bound to have a stress point or two at some time during the year. Expect to experience and address issues throughout your student's stay. This is normal and healthy!
- When assigning chores and household responsibilities, it is helpful to set clear and, preferably, written expectations. Don't assume that your student understands what it means to "take out the trash" or "do the dishes". Show them exactly how to complete tasks and offer them support and patience along the way



Tips for a Successful Start —Do's and Don'ts

- **Don't** plan a big party to welcome your student immediately after arrival. Students are tired, timid, and overwhelmed. It's hard to speak English all the time at first. A family party or get-together with neighbors is much more successful later on during your student's stay.
- **Do** plan a relaxed, casual day together. Give your student a tour of your neighborhood, your town, and the high school. Explain where things are in your house and how everything works. Visit the post office, the library, the drugstore, and other places of importance. It may be best to spread these activities out over the course of a few days to avoid overwhelming your student upon their arrival.
- **Do** treat your student like one of your own family members, even on the first day. Consistency is important, and bestowing the same responsibilities on your student as you would on members of your family will help with the adjustment process for you and your student.
- **Do** remember that everything you say may be in a language your student never uses or hears outside of the classroom. Louder voices are not any more understandable than lower voices. Both the language and the information are new, so speak slowly and use simple words. **Check for understanding often by asking your student to repeat back what you said and what they think it means.**
- **Do** remember that your student's mental picture of America probably comes from American TV shows and movies. No matter what has been said at orientation, there are expectations that can never be fulfilled. It will be a while before there is understanding and appreciation of the real America, your America!
- **Do** remember that you have your own expectations of your student or the hosting experience that may not be met. It's important to review and readjust expectations after meeting and getting to know your student. No experience will ever meet preconceived expectations, but successful host families can exceed their own expectations by being flexible and refining those expectations as they go!
- **Don't** assume your student understands because you are receiving smiles and nods in response. Smiling and nodding in agreement are non-verbal ways of pleasing you, but they do not automatically imply that you have been understood.
- **Don't** expect your student to think that everything you have is wonderful. Don't expect your student to rave about everything you share with or show them.

Helpful Hints for Host Families (Continued)

- When students experience homesickness engaging them in a healthy distraction, such as going out for ice cream, helping to peel potatoes, going to the grocery store, or any activity with another person helps to heal this problem. Keeping the student busy is a great way to deter homesickness. If you do suggest limiting contact with friends or family back home, be sure to explain why and that it is a temporary measure to help them acclimate. Remember, a student should never be cut off from their parents, however excessive contact should be addressed with the support of your Local Coordinator or AYA's student support team.
- If you run into an issue, don't panic! Most exchange student struggles are a result of a miscommunication, cultural differences, or unrealistic expectations on either the part of the student or host family. Be open to participating in a Face-to-Face communication session with your Local Coordinator to determine the root of the issue. It's important to remain open-minded, as Face-to-Face meetings/ communication sessions successfully resolve the majority of host family/student conflicts.
- Talk to your student about open communication. Let them know that addressing issues openly is an important part of being a successful family unit and enjoying a successful exchange experience.

Student Arrival

Flying to the U.S.

Students arrive in August for fall semester and full year placements. Spring semester students arrive in January. Many students will first attend an AYA sponsored orientation held just outside New York City, before flying to their host communities. Students who opt-out of AYA's national orientation will fly directly from their home country to their host community.

Your student's travel, both the international flight and the domestic flight is arranged by an AYA partner organization abroad. We try to notify families of arrival times well in advance of the date. Plans cannot be finalized until a student's placement is confirmed.

Whenever possible, AYA will work with our partners to arrange a flight into a host family or Local Coordinator's preferred airport. Occasionally, due to contract fares and airline restrictions, it may not be possible to fly a student into some airports (i.e. small regional airports). If this is the case, AYA will notify you and work with your family to identify the next closest airport. A host family with a long drive to pick up a student should know that AYA truly appreciates this kindness—and that they are making this trip for a very special reason.

If you are hosting a FLEX or YES student, travel is administered by American Councils and AFS.Travel. It is arranged in such a way that students originating from the same country will travel together in a chaperoned group on a fixed date. American Councils and AFS set up a network of airport travel staff throughout the country whenever students are in transit so that students may be assisted with connecting flights, baggage transfer, immigration issues, and weather delays. All FLEX and YES students will arrive to Washington- Dulles International Airport (IAD) and travel to their host families the following day (FLEX students) or after a 3 night arrival orientation (YES Students).

AYA students typically arrive a few days prior to the first day of school. Depending on when your student was matched and what day your districted high school starts, it's possible that your student may need to arrive a few days after the beginning of school. This is usually not a problem and most students have no trouble catching up.

Some families may wish to have their student arrive earlier than a few days before school starts so that they can get acclimated to the family and community. While this is understandable, it is not recommended and will not be approved except in rare cases. After many years of experience, AYA has found that arriving more than a few days before school starts can significantly increase homesickness, culture shock and overall adjustment. Too much unstructured time can lead to feelings of isolation, hinder the adjustment process, and create unnecessary stress for all involved.

Host families and Local Coordinators will receive detailed flight information as soon as it is available, usually in the month of July. Once confirmed, your student's flight will also be available in your host family portal.

Whenever possible, AYA encourages both host families and Local Coordinators to greet their student(s) at the airport on arrival day. If, however, you are not able to be at the airport at the time of arrival, it is important that you let your student know so that they are not disappointed. While it is preferred that either you or your Local Coordinator pick up your student from the airport, if alternate arrangements are necessary please inform the AYA National Office so that we can communicate accurate pick up information to all necessary parties.

Student Orientation

All AYA students receive a pre-departure orientation in their home country from the AYA partner abroad. AYA provides a comprehensive Pre-Departure Guide. Arrival orientation is conducted either at a group welcome program provided by AYA or at a local orientation conducted by your supervising Local Coordinator within two weeks of the student's arrival to the host community.

Information covered in arrival orientations includes AYA rules, problem solving, lines of communication, healthy coping skills, the role of the Local Coordinator, the American family, and the American high school. The Student Handbook also explains all of these topics.

Travel Delays

Whether your student is flying directly to your community from their home country or from AYA's national orientation, they have been given instructions on how to proceed if they miss a connecting flight, or if a flight is delayed or cancelled for any reason. Students are given clear instructions on how to rebook a flight and are told to call AYA's emergency travel number to let AYA know that their itinerary has changed. An AYA agent will do whatever they can to assist the student through the rebooking process. Students are also encouraged to call their host family or Local Coordinator to let them know about the delay. AYA will contact you and/or your Local Coordinator as soon as we know that the flight has been delayed and update you as new flight information becomes available. On rare occasions, a student with a late flight may be required to spend the night at an airport hotel or at the airport. While this is not ideal, it can happen, and all students and natural parents are made aware of this possibility. Some large airports have special rooms just for minors where they can sleep and spend the night with supervision.

Greeting Your Student at the Airport

Both your family and your student will be excited and maybe nervous. Your student may feel overwhelmed. Here are some suggestions on how to make the first day go smoothly:

- Prepare a large welcome sign with the student's name on it.
- Take flowers, balloons, or a small American flag for your student.
- Greet your student with a smile.
- Take cues from them on whether to shake hands, hug, or simply say welcome.
- Take photos of the special day to reflect on later.

- Retrieve the student's luggage.
- Discuss how your student is feeling and what they may need, such as a restroom, water, or a snack; students may be embarrassed or unsure of how to ask about these basic needs and will count on you for direction and guidance.

Arrival Notification to Parents

Your student's natural parents will be eager to know that the student has arrived safely in your home. Make sure that your student calls or messages home or sends an email within the first 24 hours to assure their parents they have arrived.

The First Few Days

Imagine yourself in your student's place: arriving in a foreign country after a long trip, tired and apprehensive, expected to speak a language you've never spoken outside the classroom. Keep these things in mind as you plan your welcome.

Just be yourselves. Keep your hospitality simple and spontaneous. Don't plan anything too ambitious for the first few days.

Your student may appear quiet and withdrawn at first due to feelings of homesickness and being overwhelmed by everything new. The ever-present need to speak English is tiring, if not frightening, in the beginning.

Be patient. Just do what you can to make the student feel like a member of your family. Make time in the first few days for quiet conversations where you can begin to get to know one another. Explain things in simple terms. Be explicit. Show them around your house and check to see if your student really does understand as you show them where things are and how they work (like bathroom fixtures!).

It's important to remember that when language serves as a barrier in communication, body language and tone can take precedence during a conversation. Do not be alarmed if your student's body language is not what you are accustomed to. At first, students may not exhibit the appropriate body language during a particular conversation or situation due to cultural differences. This is learned through time, communication, and experience. Likewise, your body language, tone, or even direct eye contact may be off-putting to your student and send the wrong message. It is important to be clear about your intent, and communicate with words, written or spoken, about your intent.

Preparing for High School

Your student's first day of school has likely been anticipated for many months. Your student is probably feeling all sorts of things - excited, scared, nervous! They have been dreaming about attending an American high school for a long time and it's finally coming true.

To best prepare for their first day, it will be helpful to find out what school supplies, registration paperwork and forms may be required on your student's first day. While your student has been enrolled at your local high school, they may not be officially registered. Some schools may allow students to register and choose courses online, whereas others require in-person registration - which may mean that your student has to complete registration before they can officially start school.

If you don't have high school aged children and would like support helping your student get registered contact your Local Coordinator for help. You may also want to reach out to friends or neighbors in the community with high school aged kids or relatives to see if they would like to help get your student acclimated to school during the first few days.

Sports Physicals and Immunizations

If your student is playing high school sports and/or is required to obtain a physical or additional immunizations, please inform your Local Coordinator. Sports physicals and routine immunizations are not covered by insurance and must be paid for by the student. Your LC can help identify lower cost options for obtaining necessary physicals and required immunizations.

If an immunization is mandated by the school, your student will be required to obtain it. Before scheduling any immunizations, please contact your Local Coordinator so that they can request immunization verification from the AYA office. Occasionally, students may receive catch-up immunization shortly before arriving to the U.S. that may not have been updated in their record.



Keys to Successful Adjustment

Friction within the Family

Incorporating a new family member into your existing dynamic is not always easy. There may be some bumps along your road to a successful placement. This is normal and should not be considered a reflection on the student or your family. Successful placements and problem-free placements are not mutually exclusive; some of the strongest relationships are born through the problem-solving process, where communication, trust, and new ideas are forged and nurtured.

As discussed in the expectations section of this guide, the key to minimizing common issues is setting clear expectations. If you are experiencing difficulties with certain behaviors, those may be easily reconciled through a family meeting to review your Family Expectations Worksheet and ensure that everyone understands what is expected of them.

Some issues, however, cannot be addressed through expectations; for example, a minor sibling rivalry or a teenager who is “pushing boundaries.” While both situations are typical in any home where siblings or teenagers live, they can often be resolved with an honest Face-to-Face meeting. While you may be tempted to resolve the issue privately, AYA strongly urges you to involve your Local Coordinator for even the most seemingly minor issues; your Local Coordinator is there to help both you and your student navigate through adjustment issues and to serve as a supportive but neutral third party to help you navigate any issues that may be occurring within the placement. Your Local Coordinator will be able to help you and your student identify key issues from an objective perspective. Having your Local Coordinator involved also helps document issues that may become a pattern or require additional intervention from the AYA National Office.

AYA has found that well-timed Face-to-Face Meetings can have a profound effect on resolving issues. The keys to adjusting to your new family dynamic are patience, communication, and a sense of humor!

Communication

The only way to solve problems is to talk about them. Open communication is crucial, and your willingness to let your Local Coordinator and/or the AYA National Office help you is critical to successful resolution. It is often difficult for visiting students to tell their host family that something is bothering them. They may be afraid they will hurt your feelings or assume that you will become angry and ask them to leave. Likewise, you may be hesitant to voice your concerns with a student as well; you may not want to hurt your student’s feelings, or perhaps you feel that the problem can’t be solved, so what’s the point in bringing it up?

However, think of how much worse you and your student will feel if these little problems, unaddressed, grow and finally escalate to the point where either you or your student feel like you cannot continue the placement any longer. The bottom line is that if you don’t talk about a problem, no one knows it’s there, and if no one knows it’s there, you can’t solve it!

The AYA Process

AYA cannot stress enough the importance of reporting issues, big or small, to your Local Coordinator. Many host families make the mistake of trying to resolve small issues privately. The big difference here is that this student is part of a program, and it is important that your Local Coordinator and AYA know what’s going on with the student in terms of adjustment or possible behavioral or adaptation concerns. AYA has a lot of valuable experience in dealing with minor and major exchange student issues and can help you and your student address these issues before frustration reaches its peak. Your Local Coordinator or an AYA Support Specialist may be able to shed a different light on an otherwise frustrating situation. More importantly, to effectively counsel a student and identify an action plan or disciplinary process, AYA must be aware of the situation from the beginning. Documenting a student’s behavior and progress is a key part of our problem-solving process. In some cases, an absence of documentation may hinder the disciplinary process. This can be avoided by promptly reporting all issues, even if you have already resolved them independently.

As soon as you report an issue to your Local Coordinator, whether it is big, small, or simply an item that requires clarification, your Local Coordinator will assess the situation and in many cases, may suggest that all parties sit together for a conversation. AYA refers to all meetings which are documented as Face-to-Face Meetings. Face-to-Face meetings can range from a simple conversation about general expectations to a more formal meeting where all parties discuss their concerns and come up with a game plan for working on the issues at hand. The Local Coordinator will take notes, and if necessary, review the agreed upon next steps with your family and your student, as well as set up a follow up date to review progress and determine if any further action is needed. The thought of having this type of meeting may be nerve-wracking, but if all parties understand that these conversations are a normal and useful part of the adaptation process, they can be very successful!

During your Face-to-Face/communication session, the following will likely occur:

1. **Choose a location:** After you have scheduled a convenient time to meet, **preferably soon after the issue comes up**, you will arrange a neutral location to have your conversation. Meetings will usually take place in your home, but depending on the situation, could occur at a coffee shop or restaurant; AYA recommends choosing a round table or living room area where all parties can sit in a circle as equals, rather than across a table from each other like adversaries.
2. **The conversation:** Your Local Coordinator will ask each member of the host family (if applicable) and your student to discuss the issue at hand in their own words. When one person is talking, the others will be asked to listen and wait for the appropriate time to respond. Each person should respectfully and honestly discuss their concerns or observations without judgment. Your Local Coordinator may ask that all parties give each other the benefit of the doubt and assume positive intentions before the meeting begins.

3. **Create the action plan:** After all parties have stated and discussed their concerns, your family members and your student will be asked to brainstorm possible action items and solutions that might help address the concerns discussed. Your Local Coordinator will encourage you to come up with as many ideas as possible. You will each present your solutions and be asked to come to an agreement about which ones will work for your family. The more collaborative this process is, the more likely it is that a positive and lasting resolution will be the outcome.
 4. **Schedule a follow-up meeting:** Once you have identified a few concrete solutions, you will need to set an appropriate time frame to allow for each party to implement the action plan. The average follow-up time is 2-4 weeks, depending on the issues.
- It is important that you consider the actions that will be required for each party to be successful and allow enough time for progress to be seen. *For example, if you are meeting with a student who is having trouble meeting the minimum grade requirements, you will need to consider how long it will reasonably take your student to bring up their grades.*
 - Likewise, you need to give everyone enough time to establish a pattern. *For example, if a student is being asked to remember to shut the lights off when leaving a room, they will probably fail if the student is only given one or two days to achieve this.*
- Creating a new habit takes time; give everyone a chance to get used to the new expectation and presume that all parties are doing their best to make things work.**



Tips for successful Face-to-Face and communication sessions:

- The most important tip for a successful meeting is to be open to it and assume that all parties have good intentions. The quickest way to sabotage a Face-to-Face is to enter it with the assumption that it isn't going to do any good. Going into a meeting with a positive attitude will improve the likelihood of a positive result; likewise, a negative attitude will likely ensure that the outcome will be the same. **You will be surprised by how effective a simple conversation can be when all parties participate in good faith.**
- Listen carefully! Depending on the issue, it may be frustrating to hear your student complain about your family or make excuses about a behavior that they are not happy with. Do not assume a defensive position; listen to what they is saying and try to understand that most frustrations are a result of unmet human needs, including the need to belong, the need be respected, and the need for independence.
- Positive body language during a Face-to-Face and communication session is important to maintaining an environment in which all parties feel comfortable discussing issues or concerns.
- Remember that your student is further out of their comfort zone than you are! No matter what the situation is, your student is in a foreign country, thousands of miles from their natural family, in your home having this conversation. This is a very intimidating situation for a young person to be in and may result in the student becoming withdrawn, defensive, or frustrated to the point of tears or rudeness.
- Consider the language barrier; no matter how proficient your student is in English, it is very difficult for anyone to clearly communicate his or her own feelings about a potentially sensitive topic in a language other than their own native tongue. Your student may say something that you feel is rude or inappropriate, and simply had chosen the wrong words or expressions.
- Even if a student has excellent command of the English language they may inadvertently choose words or phrasing that offends you. Always clarify the intention rather than assuming the worst. You or your Local Coordinator may need to restate the student's concerns in your own words and ask them if you understood what they meant.
- **Expect to make some adjustments as well; depending on the situation, you may need to adjust your expectations.** Many host families feel that it is the student's responsibility to change their behavior; however, in some cases, you may find that by adapting your own expectations and making small changes, you can effectively change the existing dynamic to a harmonious one quickly. For example, if a student is on their computer for several hours a day and you feel that they are not spending enough time with your family, instead of demanding that the student stops using the computer altogether, ask your student to spend a minimum of two hours of family time a day with you and your family. Reframing the issue in a more positive way is a simple way for you to achieve a desired outcome without creating a tense or punitive environment.
- Give yourself and your student time to process the situation. Do not expect change to happen overnight; work together to find clear action items that you will be satisfied with, and be patient in implementing them.

Sibling Issues

Introducing a teen into your family is exciting, but adding any new household member comes with its share of adjustment. Many families and students are under the mistaken impression that a host student will instantly bond with their host siblings and become great friends in and out of the home. While this is certainly possible, it is important for all parties to remember that the student is there to be a part of your family, and not to be the “best friend” or companion to another child (or another exchange student!). Similarly, exchange students may also need to be reminded that their host siblings are not responsible for being **their** best friends and making sure they’re entertained.

The expectation is that the host student and any children or teens living in the home will become like family, and therefore no one should be expected to play the role of best friend or companion. Just like in any family, expect that your children/teens will get along great sometimes and disagree sometimes. Conflict resolution is an important part of youth development and can often strengthen relationships!

While it’s true that students will often develop close knit friendships with their host siblings; it is also true that many times they just develop friendly sibling relationships while developing other friendships and social circles outside of the home. Both are equally valuable and can deepen over time, long after students return home. Tension between siblings is often a mismatch in expectations about what that relationship should look like.

Talking about this early on in the experience, and proactively setting the expectation that each child and/or teen in the home is encouraged to develop their own social circle and friendships is a very helpful way to proactively establish a positive foundation for independent but mutually satisfying relationships.

If you notice that there is tension or mismatched expectations are developing in your family, contact your Local Coordinator, who can help you set up a family meeting and/or offer some suggestions on how to get back on track.

Academic and Behavioral Concerns

Students are required to sign an agreement to abide by the AYA program rules and student code of conduct before they arrive. If any problem should arise, the Local Coordinator will step in and work with the student and family to determine what action is necessary. If a student is not following rules or struggling academically, your Local Coordinator will address the issue with the student and may schedule a Face-to-Face communication session to discuss the behavior and identify concrete ways to remedy the issue. When appropriate, the Local Coordinator will contact AYA’s Student Support Specialist at the National Office to issue further disciplinary action, including an advisory letter, probation, or more serious consequences. Students are well informed of AYA’s disciplinary procedures and are expected to abide by the program rules at all times.

What happens if the placement doesn’t work out?

Your Local Coordinator will work with you and your student to resolve any adjustment issues that your family or student may be experiencing. Our experience shows that most “problems” are a result of miscommunications, unrealistic expectations, or cultural misunderstandings. The majority of the time, misunderstandings can be resolved through a promptly scheduled Face-to-Face and open communication. Your Local Coordinator will conduct a Face-to-Face communication session with your family and your student as soon as an issue arises. If it is determined that the issues cannot be resolved, your Local Coordinator will contact the AYA National Office to initiate the rematch or, host family change, process. A student may not change families without approval from the National Office, as any new host family must be fully screened and vetted in compliance with AYA program and federal regulations.

Rematch and Host Family Changes

While your Local Coordinator and AYA will do everything possible to ensure that you have a rewarding experience with your student, there are times when a host family change is necessary. This is not a negative reflection on the host family or the student! Not every student and host family are a perfect match and it’s no one’s fault. Whatever the case may be, if the decision is made to move a student to a new home, your Local Coordinator will work with your family and the student to transition the student to a new home in a timely manner.

Whenever possible, AYA will replace a student in the same community and school; this is important for academic continuity, especially for students who are transferring grades. Sometimes, families express concern about a student remaining in the same community and school, especially if they have children of their own at the same high school. This is a natural concern, but please rest assured that AYA students are expected to keep their host family’s family matters private and are discouraged from discussing the reason for their host family change with anyone other than their Local Coordinator or AYA support staff.

Rematch may take some time, as your Local Coordinator and AYA must identify a new match and conduct all required screenings before the student can move to their new home.



AYA National Office Support

A dedicated, professional staff in Stamford, Connecticut, supports you, your student, and your Local Coordinator. The AYA office is comprised of a caring team of professionals who will ensure that you receive the support you need and that you have access to AYA 24 hours each day. If you are experiencing a problem or conflict with your exchange student and cannot get in touch with or do not feel comfortable contacting your Local Coordinator for any reason, call the AYA office at 800.399.5417 and ask for the Student Support Specialist assigned to your state. Your Student Support Specialist can:

- Talk with you, your exchange student, and your Local Coordinator
- Communicate with the office in the student's home country
- Get information to natural parents
- Help you find a solution

Please do not wait until you have a severe problem before calling your Local Coordinator or the AYA office. AYA encourages you to call your Student Support Specialist with any concerns, including but not limited to:

- Behavioral issues with your student
- Questions about program rules
- Concerns about your Local Coordinator

The AYA student support team will also send you quarterly online surveys throughout the year to see how you are doing and give you the opportunity to provide direct feedback to our office. We encourage you to respond to each survey so that we can effectively support you.

Our toll-free phone number is 800.399.5417. If you have an emergency outside of business hours (9 a.m. – 5 p.m. EST), listen to the directions on the recording, or simply stay on the line. After the recording has finished, an operator will come on and page an on-call staff member to assist you. You may also contact the AYA Emergency Line directly at 877.240.5225.

AYA Student Code of Conduct

AYA's goal is to ensure that all of our participants have a safe and rewarding experience while maintaining a community where the rights and dignity of all individuals are valued and respected. The student code of conduct is the foundation of the AYA disciplinary process and serves to support the program rules.

As hosts, it is important that you understand, that while we expect our students to adhere to the code of conduct and the principles and rules set forth in their handbook, there will be times, when like any other teenager, your student will push boundaries and make mistakes. This is normal, and your LC and AYA support team will work with your student to correct minor behavioral issues and reach a positive outcome. Above all, we expect that students will, at all times, conduct themselves in a manner that positively reflects the goals and values of the AYA program, their home country and themselves.

Objective of Student Code of Conduct

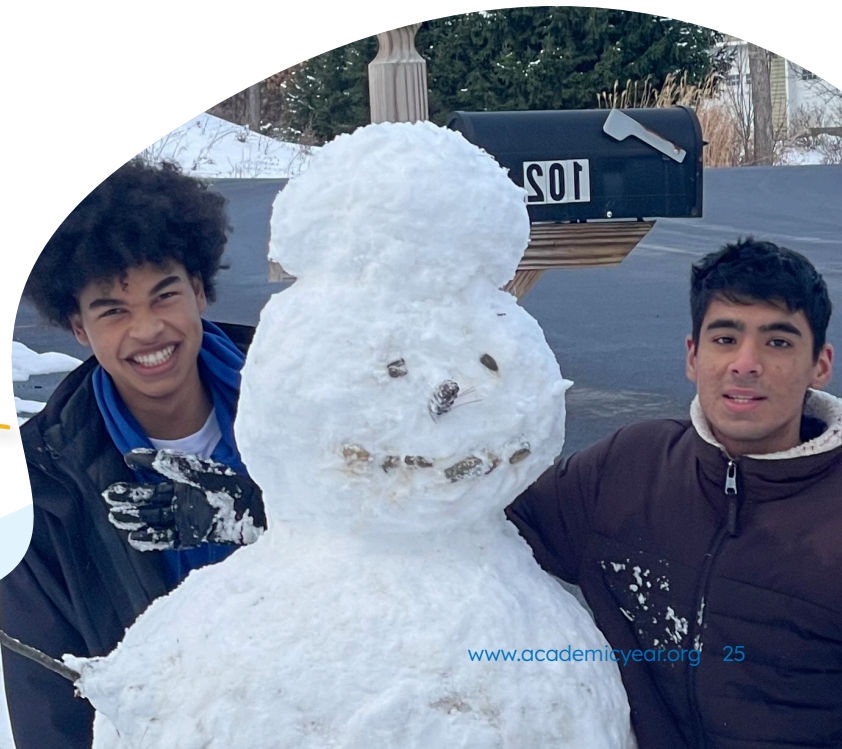
The purpose of the Student Code of Conduct is to establish a consistent set of expectations for student behavior on the AYA program. AYA's primary objective is to ensure that each of our participants has a safe and rewarding experience wherein the rights and dignity of all individuals are valued and respected. The standards and values set forth in the Student Code of Conduct are the foundation of AYA's disciplinary process and program rules. As a participant on the AYA program you are a reflection of our goals and values, and AYA expects you to represent the program well and behave in a way that honors the integrity of the program as well as our mission to bring the world together. If your behavior or attitude is determined to undermine the AYA mission or the Code of Conduct and Rules, your participation on the AYA program could be terminated prematurely.

AYA is dedicated to helping you succeed and enjoy a safe and rewarding experience. As such, we have outlined the standards of conduct that we expect all of our participants to uphold, and included examples of behaviors that are not acceptable. Please review this information carefully so that you are aware of AYA's expectations and prepared for an exciting and successful year ahead!

Standards of Personal Integrity and Honesty

The following behaviors violate AYA's standards of personal integrity and honesty:

1. **Misrepresenting personal circumstances or deliberately issuing false statements**, in order to change host families or obtain any outcome that is favorable to the student is considered a serious infraction of the student code of conduct. Student safety is paramount to AYA and the program encourages students to report any and all circumstances that have the potential to compromise a student's health, safety or overall well-being. AYA takes any allegations of impropriety, misconduct or unsuitable housing arrangements seriously and will take swift and appropriate action to ensure that the student is safe and investigate the claims accordingly. AYA values the safety, health and dignity of all of our participants, representatives and volunteers and students must be aware that issuing false claims or statements about any person or circumstance associated with the placement has the potential to permanently damage the reputation of an individual, family or community and is considered a serious breach of ethics. If a student is found to have deliberately issued any false statements or deliberately misrepresented their circumstances for any reason, they will be subject to immediate disciplinary action, up to and including disqualification.
2. **Intentionally furnishing, misrepresenting or omitting information on the student application**. AYA student applications must be completed accurately and honestly in order for AYA program staff to make an informed decision about a student's eligibility to participate on the program.
3. **Academic Dishonesty**. Any academic act of deception that is intentionally done to gain an unfair advantage for the student or another individual. This includes but is not limited to giving or receiving assistance in an academic assignment/exam; plagiarizing or paraphrasing without appropriate citation and intentionally taking credit for the work of others.



Standards of Respect and Kindness

All students are expected to show respect and kindness to others, particularly their host family members, AYA Representatives, teachers and figures of authority. Students should always use polite language, speak calmly, address individuals kindly and with consideration to their feelings. Students are entitled to the same respect and kindness from others. Except in cases where safety is an imminent risk, students are also expected to follow AYA's communication chain when reporting a concern. The following are examples of behaviors that undermine standards of respect and kindness:

Shouting, screaming, using a hostile tone or expletives towards any member of your host family, Local Coordinator or individual in a position of authority. Students must resolve conflict in a manner that is culturally appropriate and respectful. AYA has a comprehensive process in place to resolve any issues and will help students address and resolve issues in a constructive manner.

Speaking negatively or sharing personal and potentially damaging information about your host family or Local Coordinator. Barring situations of imminent danger, students should be respectful and discreet regarding their host family's personal affairs. This includes conversations, texts, messages or social media posts or exchanges that could be potentially hurtful or damaging. Host families open their hearts and homes to students with the understanding that students will respect their privacy and be considerate of their reputation within their community and/or school, even when conflicts arise. Any issues should be discussed with your LC or the AYA support team only.

Bullying: Bullying is defined as unwanted, hostile, or aggressive behavior among children and teenagers that involves a real or perceived imbalance of power. Bullying actions can occur on or off school grounds, in person, or digitally via text, internet or social media. AYA will not tolerate bullying of any kind, and any indication that a student is involved with bullying another individual will result in immediate disciplinary action up to and including disqualification. AYA students should also let their host family, Local Coordinator or AYA know if they have been or are currently being bullied on program. Bullying actions include but are not limited to:

- a) Making threats or disparaging comments
- b) Spreading rumors
- c) Assaulting someone physically or verbally
- d) Intentionally excluding an individual from a group

Standards of Safety and Dignity

The following behaviors undermine AYA's objective to respect and protect the safety, health and dignity of all individuals:

1. Intentionally or recklessly endangering the student's own health, safety or welfare or that of any individual. This includes but is not limited to the following:

- a) Possession of any object classified as a weapon (i.e. knives, firearms, bludgeon weapons, brass knuckles, explosives, etc.).
- b) Operating a motor vehicle without a license or outside of AYA program rules.
- c) Driving with a person who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- d) Driving with a person who is showing irresponsible behavior (i.e. cell phone use, texting, speeding, racing, etc.).
- e) Consuming and/or sharing drugs, alcohol, tobacco, e-cigarettes, including abuse of over the counter drugs/supplements and prescription drugs being used for recreational purposes.
- f) Possession of drugs or alcohol, tobacco or e-cigarettes, and/or related paraphernalia (any equipment, product or item intended or designed for the use, including growing, harvesting, packaging, testing, storing, concealing or ingesting drugs alcohol or tobacco).

2. Disorderly Conduct: Any behavior that is intended to be disruptive, threatening, lewd or indecent. This includes the intentional or reckless destruction or damage of personal property (i.e. vandalism, tire slashing, damaging pranks).

3. Demonstrating a lack of sound judgment and maturity by engaging in behavior that could compromise the student's own safety and wellbeing. For example:

- a) Getting into a car with a stranger;
- b) Leaving the home or school without permission and/or knowledge of your surroundings
- c) Knowingly going to places where illegal activity could be present (i.e., parties or a friend's house; concerts, after-prom parties, etc.)

4. Irresponsible use of social media/communication outlets:

- a) Engaging in sexually explicit conversations via social media, text messages or other digital communications
- b) Sharing sexually explicit or violent images or videos.
- c) Posting or sharing photos that may be sexually suggestive
- d) Posting or sharing content that disparages or demeans any individual, race, religion or sexual orientation
- e) Posting, sharing or commenting on content that could compromise the trust, privacy or character of the student, his or her host family or any other peer or member of the community

5. **Harassment:** AYA defines harassment as any instance or repeated instances of conduct which annoys, threatens or causes an individual to fear for his or her safety. AYA will not tolerate any behavior that is intended to threaten, disparage or offend an individual. Examples of harassing behavior include but are not limited to:

- a) Uninvited comments about any individual's appearance.
- b) Unwanted touching, gestures or comments of a sexual nature including, verbal, non-verbal and written communication.
- c) Derogatory comments intended to disparage or demean an individual based on sex, religion, race, ethnicity, physical or mental challenges, or sexual orientation.

- d) Physical assault of any kind.

AYA Program Rules
The program 'rules' are part of the AYA Student Code of Conduct that highlight and reinforce specific provisions that students need to be aware of and follow at all times in order to remain in good standing with the program. Failure to abide by the Code of Conduct which includes all the AYA Program Rules will result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from the program. It is important to note that AYA has several **Zero Tolerance** rules that will result in immediate disqualification from the program. Other serious infractions that could result in immediate termination will be reviewed by the disciplinary committee in a disqualification hearing. **Zero Tolerance** rules and behavior that could result in immediate dismissal from the program are noted below.

1. Students must abide by all U.S federal and state laws (**Zero Tolerance**). This includes laws related to drugs, alcohol, theft, assault, and other criminal behavior. Students who violate U.S. law may be subject to prosecution within the American justice system. Students who are 18 years old should be especially mindful that if they break the law, they will be charged and prosecuted as an adult, which could have serious and longstanding effects on their criminal record. **Breaking the law may be grounds for immediate program termination.**
2. It is against the law in the United States for high school students to buy or drink alcohol (**Zero Tolerance**). AYA program rules strictly prohibits the purchase, possession or consumption of alcohol while on-program. The legal age for buying and consuming alcohol in the United States is 21.



3. The use and/or possession of drugs or drug paraphernalia under any circumstances is strictly prohibited (Zero Tolerance). Sharing, selling, and using prescription drugs for recreational reasons is forbidden. Examples of illicit drugs include, cocaine, marijuana, LSD, methamphetamines, etc. Breach of this rule will result in immediate termination. It is important to note that even if you are 18 years old or live in a state where marijuana is legal, use and possession of marijuana is strictly prohibited while on the AYA Program and will result in immediate disqualification.
4. Expulsion from school (**Zero Tolerance**). If a student is expelled or a high school rescinds a student's enrollment for behavioral or academic reasons, the student will be disqualified immediately. School suspension will result in immediate probation and is grounds for a disqualification hearing.
5. The possession or use of vaping devices, e-cigarettes, tobacco, or nicotine products is strictly prohibited under AYA policy and U.S. law for individuals under 21. While not classified as a zero-tolerance offense, this is a serious violation of program rules which will result in immediate probation and is grounds for a disqualification hearing.
6. Harassment/bullying of any kind is strictly prohibited. This includes but is not limited to physical assault, verbal harassment or sexual harassment. **Students who engage or are complicit in the harassment of another individual will be subject to a disciplinary hearing that may result in immediate disqualification.**

7. AYA students are not permitted to purchase, carry, or use firearms or any items classified as a weapon (i.e. knives, air/pellet guns, cross bows) under any circumstances including under the supervision of an instructor or host parent. Students should report any instance of firearms being stored improperly or being offered to a student to handle to their LC or the AYA national office. Possession or use of weapons is grounds for a disqualification hearing.
8. Students are not permitted to drive any motor vehicle (including motorcycles, mopeds, and cars). Driving outside of program guidelines is grounds for a disqualification hearing.
9. Sexual intercourse while on program is strictly prohibited and grounds for program termination. Students must be cognizant of inappropriate relationships, including (but not limited to) contact with minors, persons over the age of 18, or any members of the Host Family. **Sexual intercourse is grounds for a disqualification hearing.**
10. Along with maintaining a minimum grade point average of C+, students must be in good behavioral standing with their high school at all times. This includes attending classes daily and on time, and turning in all required assignments. All students must enroll in a full course of academic classes, which must include math, science, English and U.S history or social studies. **Failure to maintain or demonstrate a concerted effort to maintain grade requirements is grounds for serious disciplinary action including disqualification.**
11. Daily attendance at school is mandatory. Students who are home sick for more than a few days must provide a doctor's note for their absences. Repeated tardies (lateness) or unexcused absences from classes are grounds for a disciplinary committee hearing. **Failure to maintain proper attendance and participation in school is grounds for serious disciplinary action including disqualification.**
12. Grade placement, graduation eligibility, and athletic participation are determined by the high school. AYA students are required to comply with the policies of the high school in which they are enrolled. Students will not be permitted to change schools or host families in order to obtain a diploma, change grades, take a specific course, or participate in sports or extracurricular clubs.
13. AYA is an academic cultural exchange program for high school students. Students should expect to complete one semester or year in the U.S. and return home to pursue future educational endeavors. Students should not expect to take college examinations, apply to college/university or initiate a change in visa status while on the AYA program. Students may be subject to disciplinary action if their actions while on program are not aligned with the AYA's academic and cultural objectives.
14. Students must abide by AYA's social media policy and remain aware that while they are a participant on the AYA program, they are a reflection of AYA and its values. Any social media activity that may bring the student, host family or program negative attention is considered grounds for disciplinary action. Students must act responsibly when using social media and the internet and be mindful of the websites and platforms they are using. Students are not permitted to visit adult websites, or websites that promote illegal or violent activity. **Using social media or digital communication to exploit yourself or another individual intentionally or otherwise is grounds for a disqualification hearing**





Disciplinary Policies and Procedures:

AYA students are expected to conduct themselves at all times in a manner that positively reflects themselves, their home country, and the goals of the AYA program. Students must follow all U.S. laws and AYA, host family, and high school rules and guidelines. Students are required to sign a copy of the AYA rules prior to their arrival in the U.S. Disciplinary decisions are made at the discretion of the AYA Disciplinary Committee based on information provided by the LC, the host family, the student, and the high school (when applicable). It is strongly recommended that students carefully review the program rules with their natural parents prior to departing from their home country.

Documenting and addressing academic or behavioral concerns is an important part of the disciplinary process. It is very important for host families to inform their Local Coordinator or the AYA student support team when there are problems, no matter how small they are. AYA cannot effectively administer the disciplinary process in a timely manner without the appropriate documentation about the issues that are being reported.

Face-to-Face Meetings Sessions

A Face-to-Face family meeting is generally the first step in resolving most issues. This can be an informal conversation or a more formal family meeting where you and your student have the opportunity to candidly discuss any issues that may arise within the placement. This meeting might be the result of an issue that you report or it may come from the student. In some cases, your Local Coordinator may become aware through the monthly check in process that there is a communication gap and may recommend that everyone come together for a family discussion. Your Local Coordinator will conduct the meeting and act as a neutral party who will help you and your student work through any issues big or small.

- Face-to-Face Meetings have proven to be very successful in opening a dialogue between host families and students as well as clarifying cultural and/or language miscommunications.

- A Face-to-Face Meeting is a critical step in the disciplinary process and will be done prior to any disciplinary action or host family change request.
- Students and host families are encouraged to attend Face-to-Face sessions with an open mind and positive attitude.

Guidance Directive

Over the course of the year, students may receive a guidance directive that may serve to:

- Document a particular concern or behavior.
- Implement guidelines on how to make the necessary adjustments to be successful on the program.

A guidance directive may be issued with or in lieu of an Advisory Letter. Guidance directives may not lead to further disciplinary action.

Advisory

An advisory letter is issued by the AYA Student Support Specialist after a breach of conduct or program guidelines has been reported and reviewed. Advisory letters are usually issued after a Face-to-Face Meeting has occurred, and the student has been formally advised of the program or host family guidelines that have been compromised or need improvement. In cases where the breach of guidelines is indisputable, for example, if a student is not meeting minimum grade requirements, an academic advisory letter may be issued without a formal Face-to-Face Meeting. In such cases, the Local Coordinator will notify the student of the advisory prior to issuance and will review the letter and requirements for improvement with the student after it is received. A copy of the advisory is sent to the student. The intent of the advisory letter may be as follows:

- To advise the student that certain academic or behavioral conduct or attitudes need improvement and provide feedback on how to improve going forward.
- To formally inform the student, the natural family, and the overseas partners of unacceptable behavior or program violation.
- To advise the student that the National Office is aware of this behavior.

- To advise what specific steps must be taken by the student to avoid further disciplinary action.
- To formally define a time frame for reviewing the terms and recommendations of the advisory letter.

Probationary Status

Being placed on probation is considered very serious. Students will be subject to probation for the following reasons:

- A major breach of program rules or host family guidelines.
- Not abiding by the terms of a previously issued advisory letter or guidance directive
- Conduct unbecoming of an exchange student that may jeopardize the reputation of the student, host family, or the AYA program.

Prior to being placed on probation, the student will be contacted by their Student Support Specialist to discuss the disciplinary concerns. Students are expected to be honest and forthcoming when speaking to a Student Support Specialist; and to share their perspective on any matter related to the events or behavior that have prompted the probation meeting. Your Local Coordinator will also present your input and feedback based on the current situation to our Student Support Team.



Disqualification

Disqualification is not a decision that is taken lightly; whenever possible we will seek to provide counseling and appropriate corrective measures so that students have the opportunity to reflect and grow from their mistakes while on-program.

If a student's conduct is deemed serious enough to merit termination, AYA's student support team will review the case to determine whether program disqualification is warranted. Any student who fails to comply with the AYA rules, the host family rules, or local and federal laws may be terminated from the AYA program at any point in the year. Sending a student home is usually considered a last resort, and this decision is made at the sole discretion of the AYA Disciplinary Committee. This step is usually taken after other corrective measures have failed or if the infraction has violated a major program rule or a federal or state law.

In some cases, a student's actions may result in disqualification from the program without prior disciplinary action. Students who breach a zero- tolerance rule, under any circumstances, will be dismissed from the program immediately. In addition to zero-tolerance rules, there are other serious infractions that may result in immediate termination, including use/possession of weapons, school suspension and sexual activity. While AYA understands that good students sometimes experience lapses in judgement, our zero-tolerance policies have been carefully considered, and are in place so that AYA can safely administer the program, and in doing so, equalize the consequences for all students who break rules that could compromise their safety or wellbeing, or the safety and wellbeing of others. **Students are notified of zero-tolerance policies and the consequences of breaking them, both prior to applying to the program and after being accepted. No exceptions will be made for zero-tolerance rules.** Despite the early departure from program, we encourage students to maintain the connections they have created with their host family members and friends.

Although unlikely, if your student is disqualified from the program due to a serious breach of program rules, your family may feel frustrated and disappointed with this consequence. This is a normal response, which AYA fully understands and empathizes with, however, no exceptions will be made for zero-tolerance rules. Despite the early departure from program, we encourage students to reflect positively on their time in the U.S. and maintain the connections they have created with their host family members and friends.

Once the AYA Disciplinary Committee has made their final decision, written notice will be issued to all parties concerned, and arrangements for the student's return flight home are then made. Depending on the situation, the time of year, and the country the student is returning to, it can take anywhere from a few days to a week or so to finalize the student's departure date. Students are expected to be on their best behavior as they prepare to return home. Once the student's departure date has been confirmed, their visa will be cancelled.

The decision to disqualify a FLEX or YES student differs slightly and is made in conjunction with the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). AYA will submit a formal request for early repatriation of a student whose behavior or incident warrants disqualification to the ECA who makes the final decision.

Medical Disqualification

In the unfortunate situation that a student falls ill or requires medical treatment beyond the scope of what an AYA host family can provide, a student may be terminated from the program for health reasons. This decision is made with the interest and well-being of the student in mind, and in the context of what the AYA program can safely offer a student.

Reasons for medical disqualification include, but are not limited to:

- Discovery of preexisting medical conditions not disclosed on a student's application, particularly complex or nervous that may require close or ongoing monitoring by a physician or guardian. disorders or conditions that require close monitoring by a physician
- Injuries requiring surgery and/or ongoing physical therapy
- Serious medical conditions that require extensive medical care and follow-up care
- Eating disorders or any disordered eating that may be negatively impacting the students physical and/or mental health and/or caused a noticeable change in their appearance, physical health and/or overall demeanor.
- Emotional or psychological concerns that may require ongoing counseling and close monitoring.

When determining eligibility for a medical situation, AYA must carefully consider current and future risk to the student, the ability of a host family and Local Coordinator to reasonably care for that student for the remainder of the year, as well as insurance coverage and limitations. Most importantly, AYA considers the best interest of the student which (the disappointment of leaving the program early notwithstanding), is usually to return to their home country where they can receive medical treatment and follow up care with the support and supervision of their natural parents.

A medical disqualification is difficult for all parties concerned. Host families never cease to amaze us with their compassion and generosity, and in some cases, may wish to continue hosting a student who has been deemed ineligible to remain on-program. AYA recognizes that host families are deeply committed to their students and we sincerely appreciate the goodwill that caring host families extend in these situations. Ultimately, however, a student's long-term medical care and needs are best determined by their natural parents. Once the decision has been made, we ask that host families support their student by supporting our decision.

Health and Safety

Mental Health

Your student may experience feelings of sadness, loneliness or anxiety during the program year. This is typical of any teenager, especially a teen who is experiencing high school in a foreign country! Learning and adapting to a new culture and language far away from the comforts of home, is a stressful experience that requires patience, maturity and adequate coping skills. Depending on the student, culture shock can set in at different times throughout the year. Navigating through these feelings can be difficult and we encourage students, host families and local coordinators to speak candidly about any sad or negative feelings they are experiencing so that they can effectively process them and move on. It is important to know your student, develop a rapport and bring any concerns to the attention of your Local Coordinator, and/or AYA support staff. As with any adjustment issue, open communication, combined with the patience and support of a caring host family are the cornerstones of overcoming obstacles.

When to Seek Support

While experiencing some feelings of sadness and anxiety is normal, if you notice or suspect that your student is experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety that are persistent, alarming, or beyond the scope of typical cultural or teenage challenges, it is important for you to report your concerns to your Local Coordinator or to an AYA student support staff member immediately.

If a student is demonstrating symptoms of depression, anxiety or other potential mental/nervous disorder, AYA work with your family, your Local Coordinator and the student to ensure that the student receives the appropriate support and care that he or she needs to feel better and be healthy. Support plans for suspected mental health concerns are established with the AYA support team and with the input of appropriate health care professionals and resources when necessary. AYA values the safety, health and wellbeing of our students, above all, and will make recommendations accordingly. In some cases, AYA may recommend that a student return home early to receive care and support under the supervision of their natural family.

Signs and Symptoms:

Fostering open communication is key and can take effort on your part to establish trust and develop a close rapport with your student. Knowing your student will help you identify significant changes to their 'normal' baseline behavior that might indicate a more serious issue:

Possible Symptoms of Depression: *Please note that the time to become concerned is when these signs are prolonged for more than 2 weeks and/or disruptive to daily life.*

- Irritability, expressing anger over seemingly minor issues
- Feelings of worthlessness, excessive self-blame/criticism
- Loss of interest in regular activities
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Lack of interest in going to school; increased absences or declining academic performance
- Excessive sleeping; frequently tired and unable to participate in family activities
- Anxiety or agitation; restlessness
- Altered physical appearance; a radical change in style, lack of grooming or hygiene
- Noticeable weight loss/gain
- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Intentionally disruptive behavior
- Engaging in risky behaviors
- Feelings of sadness; hopelessness
- Expressing a grim outlook on life; thoughts or talk of suicide or death

Self – Harm

For some teens, the feelings of stress, anxiety or depression may become over whelming to a point where they attempt, or rely on self-injury as a coping mechanism. For teens who engage in self-harming behaviors regularly, they may find immediate relief from the sensation of hurting themselves. Self-harming behaviors include cutting, biting, hair pulling, or other unhealthy physical manifestations.

Symptoms may include:

- Fresh cuts, wounds
- Linear cuts or scars on the arms, legs, torso (these are the most common areas where self-injury occurs, as they can be easily hidden by clothing, however any area of the body can be affected)
- Wearing long sleeves, long pants, even when it's unseasonable
- Blood or blood-stained objects/tissue in the trash or toilet
- Claims of frequent accidents to explain scarring or bruising

If at any time during the program year, you believe that your student is not able to cope with their feelings in a healthy way, and is considering or has already attempted to harm themselves contact AYA immediately. AYA encourages you to use our emergency answering service anytime you are concerned about your student's safety or well-being.

If you feel that your student is in immediate danger of hurting themselves or someone else, call 911 immediately and make sure that someone stays with the student until the appropriate help arrives. Contact AYA immediately and/or as soon as the student's safety has been secured.

It is unlikely that your student will experience any serious issues while on-program, however, we want you to be aware of possible signs so that you can report concerning or unusual behavior or symptoms right away. . Your Local Coordinator and the AYA student support team are in place to support you and will be able to help your student receive the care and support necessary to stay safe and healthy.

Personal Safety:

There will be times when your student may be confused about behavior and what is and is not culturally acceptable, which can lead to exposure to unsafe situations. We have provided a list of behaviors and actions that will help your student understand what types of interactions are socially acceptable and what types are not regarding personal safety. We have also created a safety video that all students and host families view during their respective orientations. To watch the video again, you may log on to your host family portal.

Positive/Appropriate Displays of Affection could include:

- Brief hugs
- Pats on the shoulder and back
- A handshake
- High-fives/slapping hands
- Verbal praise
- Brief touch on hands, face, shoulder, arms
- Arm around shoulder
- Holding hands during family prayer
- Brief kiss on the cheek

Negative/Inappropriate Displays of Affection could include:

- Inappropriate/uncomfortably long hugs and embraces
- Intentional brushing against a person's body, patting, or pinching
- Adult holding hands with student
- Kisses on the mouth
- Student sitting on adult's lap
- Touching bottoms, chest, or genital areas
- Showing affection in isolated areas like a bathroom or bedroom
- Lying on the same bed
- Touching thighs, knees or legs
- Wrestling and tickling
- Any type of massage
- Written or spoken compliments referring to body or body development
- Giving excessive or personal gifts or money
- Private meals in intimate places
- Any unwanted attention

Modesty Guidelines:

- No nudity by student or host family
- No contact between student and adult in underwear
- Wear robes over your pajamas
- No suggestive or revealing clothing
- Wearing only a towel is not acceptable

Behavior Guidelines:

- No requests for meeting with students privately
- No telephoned, mailed, or emailed messages of a sexual or intimate nature
- Avoid emoticons and text abbreviations whenever possible. Try to limit texting communication for 'need-to-know' information only
- No flirting
- No jokes or stories with sexual connotation
- No lewd remarks or whistles
- No sharing or displaying of photos or materials of a sexual nature

What might be culturally appropriate for Americans may make an individual student feel uncomfortable (i.e. a family who hugs a lot). Be aware of any verbal or non-verbal cues that may indicate that your student is uncomfortable with a particular interaction. For example, avoiding or evading certain interactions, shying away from a particular individual, showing appearance of being uncomfortable, shaking head or saying no. Likewise, if your particular student demonstrates affection in a way that makes any member of your household uncomfortable, it is appropriate to explain to the student that your family prefers to show affection in alternate ways. Comfort levels may change as your relationship builds, however, it is important for all parties to respect each other's personal preferences.



Create Appropriate Boundaries:

Creating appropriate boundaries is an important part of establishing a comfortable living environment for both you and your student. Cultural and family norms may differ vastly between your student and your family members, and it is important to recognize and respect those differences. Regardless, there are certain boundaries that should be adhered to and established early on to minimize any misunderstandings or potential for discomfort and maximize a positive experience.

Do not engage in intimate conversations of a personal nature; it is not appropriate for adults to discuss previous traumas, marital, financial or relationship issues with students in any capacity.

Avoid spending time alone behind closed doors together; whenever possible interactions should always be observable and interruptible.

Clearly establish what areas of the home are not appropriate for the student to enter without express permission (i.e. host parents' bedroom). Discuss and ensure that everyone understands and respects etiquette for knocking before entering bed/bathrooms, or other private areas of the home.

Social Media/Texting:

If your student is linked to your social media account, be aware of the content you or your adult friends are posting. Posts that are suggestive, sexual, satirical, or express extreme political, social or religious views have the potential to be misunderstood and could make a student uncomfortable. While it is within your right to post whatever content you choose on your social media outlets, we encourage you to limit your student's access to

certain content to avoid any uncomfortable situations. Likewise, refrain from engaging with your student and/or their friends on social media. It is tempting to quickly respond, however, a typo or unknown colloquialism could create an awkward misunderstanding.

Tone and intention are difficult to interpret in any sort of text, so we encourage direct communication whenever possible to minimize cultural or semantic misunderstandings. This includes communications via text and email.

Safety Precautions

AYA encourages our students to be open-minded and meet new people while they are in the U.S. However, in doing so we also encourage them to exercise caution and be aware of interactions that could make them feel uncomfortable or lead to a potentially dangerous situation. As a host parent, it is important that you are aware of whom your student is spending time with and where they are going.

Below we have identified a few "red flags" that should be closely monitored and/or reported. While they are not each, in themselves, always indicators of a potentially dangerous relationship or situation, they should serve as reminders to be aware of what may or may not be appropriate. While making new friends is an important part of the exchange experience, we need to make sure that our students are forming relationships with appropriate peers that are healthy and positive.

- Be aware of any individual who seeks to spend a lot of one-on-one "alone" time with your student outside of an appropriate context. For example, a neighbor who wants to take your

student to the movies alone or an older “friend” from the gym who invites your student to one-on-one activities without any other family or friends.

- Texting & Social Media – Students should always be reminded about the importance of knowing whom they are texting and interacting with on social media websites. If you find that an adult or peer is contacting your student excessively or making comments to or about them that make you or your student feel uncomfortable, contact AYA right away.
- Any adult who gives your student lavish gifts, secret gifts, or gifts that are contingent upon an action from the student (e.g. a neighbor or friend’s parent tells your student that if they get good grades, they will receive a special gift).
- Any adult who asks your student to keep secrets or treats them like a confidant. It is not appropriate for adults to confide in teenagers as equals, nor is it appropriate for an adult to expect a teenager to keep a secret of any kind.
- Flirtations and sexually explicit jokes are never acceptable between an adult and a minor.
- Be aware of any adult who encourages your student to break rules or engage in illegal or inappropriate behavior of any kind.

As hosts, you have the best vantage point in terms of knowing about your student’s relationships, as well as observing any behavior changes in your student. If at any time you are concerned that your student may be in an unsafe relationship with another person, or you have any concerns about their behavior, we encourage you to contact your LC of the AYA office immediately.

It is never appropriate, under any circumstances, for any adult or household member to solicit, approach or touch a student in a sexual or suggestive manner. Likewise, it is inappropriate for any student to initiate sexual contact with an adult or any member of the host family household. If you learn or suspect that your student has been the subject of any type of actual or alleged sexual abuse or exploitation, please contact your Local Coordinator and/or the AYA office immediately. Such contact may constitute a criminal offense, and AYA will cooperate fully with the authorities in the investigation and prosecution of any such illegal activities.

Additional Safety Tips:

- Talk to your student about your community before they go anywhere new or unfamiliar to ensure that it is a safe place/area.
- Let your student know if there are any parts of town to avoid when walking around during the day or night.
- When going out, encourage your student to be with two or more people and avoid situations where they will be alone.
- Make sure that if your student goes out, that they are carrying or have access to a functioning and well-charged cell phone so that they can call you if needed. Ask your student for the names and numbers of their friends and friends’ parents before they go out.
- Remind your student to keep your family’s phone number(s), the Local Coordinator’s number, and AYA’s office and emergency numbers with them at all times.

- Write down emergency service numbers for your student if they are going to be staying home alone for any length of time.
- Remind your student that if they are ever in a situation with friends or an adult that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe for any reason, they should leave immediately and/or call you, your Local Coordinator, or a trusted adult right away.
- Always trust your instincts and encourage your student to always trust their own feelings if something doesn’t feel right, let someone know!

Emergency Instructions at schools:

- American High Schools are required to conduct safety drills, including fire drills and school lock-downs, to ensure that students and faculty are familiar with emergency protocols. Students are urged to pay attention to their school’s safety protocols and drills, and ask questions if they do not understand the instructions given to them.
- If a student ever feels unsafe during school for any reason, it is important that they inform a responsible adult. Students should be reminded and encouraged to reach out to their guidance counselor or a trusted teacher for support and immediate assistance, especially if a student is concerned about their wellbeing or the safety or welfare of another student.

Emergency

If you or your student experiences an emergency of any kind outside of business hours (9 a.m. – 5 p.m. EST), AYA has a 24-hour toll free emergency answering service available to assist you 7 days a week, year round. Our toll-free phone number is 800.322.4678. Follow the prompts from the operator or stay on the line to be connected with the answering service. An agent will take your message, and your call will be promptly returned by an AYA support staff member.

Our goal is to ensure that you and your student enjoy a safe and rewarding year together; we encourage you to reach out if you have any concerns. We are here to help you!

If your student has been the victim of any kind of assault, or is involved in an accident or incident where their safety is in jeopardy, we encourage you and/or your student to contact 911 Emergency to receive immediate assistance.



The Host Family Commitment

AYA's goal is to ensure that our students and host families all enjoy a safe and mutually rewarding experience within a culture of mutual understanding and respect for others. We ask that all participants and volunteers adhere to a code of conduct that ensures that all individuals involved feel safe, respected, and enriched by the experience. By hosting a student, host families agree to support our shared goals and abide by AYA's rules and guidelines.

Host Family Expectations

Hosting is an altruistic endeavor intended to foster mutual understanding, cultural enrichment and global friendships. As an AYA Host Family, you have volunteered to participate in the AYA program and understand that you will not receive monetary compensation for your services. Prohibition of compensation is a federal mandate intended to further public diplomacy efforts. With this objective in mind, host families agree to positively reflect the goals of the AYA program, American culture and the spirit of the American family.

Above all, host families commit to providing and maintaining a safe and nurturing environment, where the student and all members of the Host Family respect each other and feel comfortable. It is important for all members of the Host Family to treat the student with respect and that each household member be enthusiastic about the hosting experience and seek to involve the student in the family's day-to-day experiences. Successful host families will create an environment that encourages an open dialogue and fosters understanding among all members of the Host Family.

Hosting Requirements:

Housing and Transportation Requirements:

1. A safe and sanitary home environment that includes:
 - a. A bedroom for the student (may be shared with another host sibling of the same gender and relatively close in age).
 - b. A proper bed (convertible beds, futons, air mattresses and pull-out sofas are prohibited by federal regulations).
 - c. A quiet place to study and access to reliable Internet service.
 - d. A nutritious and balanced diet, including three quality meals per day.
 - e. Reasonable access to phone/internet so that the student may contact their natural parents, Local Coordinator and other support outlets.
2. Transportation to and from school (bus, carpool, etc.).
3. Transportation to and from their own religious services, should the student wish to attend.
2. Local Coordinators are required to check-in with your family, separately, at least once per month via phone, email, video chat or in-person. Coordinators are also required to visit you in your home, **at least once per semester**. AYA encourages you to contact our office directly if your family or student has any questions about the support you are receiving or required monthly contact.
3. Host families are responsible for reporting any material changes within the family to their Local Coordinator, included but not limited to:
 - a. A new person (i.e. grandparent, adult child, foster child) moving into the home longer than a few days (all adults 18 years and older must agree to a Criminal Background Check)
 - b. A household member moving out of the home
 - c. Separation or Divorce
 - d. Job loss of one or both host parents
 - e. Significant illness of any household member
 - f. Any other major changes to the home dynamic that could impact your hosting experience
4. Host families are required to report any breaches of AYA program rules or student misconduct to their Local Coordinator or the AYA National Office. While it is tempting to resolve issues independently, your student is on an organized program and we must be aware of and document any major or minor issues.
5. There may be a rare occasion where you are no longer willing or able to continue hosting the student. Host families are asked to provide advanced notice to their Local Coordinator and/or the AYA National Office when requesting a Host Family change. For non-emergent Host Family changes, your Local Coordinator will work with you to determine a mutually satisfactory timeline for the transition, with the best interest of your family and your student in mind. Your Local Coordinator and AYA will make every effort to rematch your student with a family who lives **in the same community** to that their academics are not disrupted. This may take some time, and your patience is greatly appreciated.

Communication Requirements:

1. The Local Coordinator must meet with your **student in person, every other month at a minimum**. Students living with one single person in the home will receive more frequent check-ins. Host families agree to monthly contact, and not to impede the student's access to their Local Coordinator in any way. Host families will ensure that students are available to meet with their Local Coordinator when necessary.

Safety Requirements:

1. Report any safety concerns immediately to Local Coordinator and/or the AYA National Office. This includes any actual or allegations of abuse or exploitation, self-harming behavior or major accidents or illnesses. The AYA emergency answering service is available 24/7 for assistance and support.

2. Provide appropriate supervision to your student at all times. Even though many families feel comfortable leaving their teenaged children home alone for a weekend, *AYA students are not permitted to spend weekends or vacations without adult supervision; if you are planning on being away from the home for more than a day, please contact your Local Coordinator to coordinate alternate housing arrangements for your student.*
3. In any home where firearms or any other weapons are present (bow and arrow, knives, handguns, etc.), families are required to store such weapons properly under lock and key in a secure location that will not be accessible to students at any time. Firearms must be stored in a gun safe, vault or locker that is tamper-proof and not accessible to anyone other than the registered owner. In addition to storing weapons in locked storage, locking devices on firearms are also recommended. Ammunition should be stored separately and also protected by separate independent locks. **AYA students are prohibited from using or even handling any type of firearm or deadly weapon, even if being supervised by a licensed instructor, a trained parent or adult. If you are unable to meet this requirement, you should inform your Local Coordinator or AYA's National Office immediately.**
4. Many families use security cameras and/or recording devices to keep their homes safe and secure. Host families are required to disclose the presence of security cameras or other recording devices in and around the home to their student and Local Coordinator. Security cameras and/or recording devices that observe private spaces like bathrooms, bedrooms or sleeping areas are not permitted, even if they are not actively recording. If recording devices were not discussed or disclosed during your in-home visit, please inform your LC and student as soon as possible.
2. Students may not drink alcohol under any circumstances, even with permission from an adult or host parent. Any amount of alcohol consumption or possession, regardless of the circumstance, is strictly prohibited and will result in the student's immediate disqualification.
3. Students may not drive or operate a motor vehicle under any circumstance including a driver's education course. Host families should not allow students to drive for any reason, including for practice. **AYA students are also strictly prohibited from operating or being a passenger on ATVs, motorcycles and other recreational vehicles.** Students may not participate in activities that require that they operate or ride on restricted vehicles, even in the company of a household member or friend.
4. 4. Students are not permitted to work. Students may opt to earn pocket money by doing small jobs for no more than 10 hours a week (i.e. paid baby-sitting, yard work, etc.).
5. Students may not be charged for food, gas, household utilities, or any expense related to food or housing. When dining out as a family, the Host Family is responsible for covering the cost of the student's meal. Students should pay for their own entertainment and personal items, including their own cell phone plan.
6. Host families may not lend money to or borrow money from a student for any reason.
7. Pursuant to federal regulations, students must have their own passports and DS-2019 forms in their own possession at all times. No person, including a Host Family member or Local Coordinators, may withhold a student's personal identification or travel documents for any reason, including for safe-keeping.
8. AYA students are not permitted to handle or possess firearms or weapons of any kind. Students are not permitted to participate in activities that involve handling firearms or weapons, including under the supervision of a host parent or trained instructor.

Prohibitions

1. 1. Students should not be expected to babysit or assume a disproportionate amount of household responsibility on a regular basis. Students are expected to actively engage and participate in the family unit. This includes contributing to household chores, including assistance with tidying up, vacuuming, etc. Chores should be reasonable, age-appropriate and equitable among household members, particularly if there are other children or teens living in the home.



End-of-Year Preparations

End of Stay

AYA's end of year policies are designed to ensure that student's return home safely while maintaining compliance with visa regulations and program guidelines. The official program end is the student's last day of school, and students should return home within a few days of that date. If necessary, and with your permission, students may stay up to a maximum of 7 days after the last day of school.

We encourage families and students to plan trips and vacations during the program and well before the end of the program. We ask that any family vacations or celebrations you wish to include the student in take place prior to the date your student must return home (within 7 days of the last day of school). We sincerely appreciate the generosity of our host families and hope that the relationship you have developed with your student will continue long after the student returns home.

Extensions (fall-to-spring semester)

If you are hosting an August semester student who would like to extend for another semester, please contact your Local Coordinator. Only August semester (5 month) students are eligible to apply for another semester. Your Local Coordinator will provide you with the appropriate forms for signature. All parties—the host family, Local Coordinator, school, student, natural parents, and National Office— must agree to the extension. To be eligible, students must remain in their current host family and high school

and be in good standing academically and behaviorally with the AYA program. Students who have received an official advisory letter or are on probation may not be permitted to extend. AYA reserves the right to accept or deny any extension applications. Students are aware, when applying for a single semester program, that extensions requests are not guaranteed. Host families are under no obligation to host for a second semester, and should only agree if they are, in good faith, willing and able to do so. If a student is approved to extend, they will purchase additional insurance, and their visas will be extended. **Students may not travel outside of the U.S. until they have physically received their extended DS2019 form.**

Flight Plans

AYA students are required to hold valid return airline tickets. These tickets are purchased either by the student or through AYA partner agencies. AYA does not directly purchase international tickets for students. On occasion, AYA does purchase domestic tickets for students.

Depending on what country your student is from and/or what agency booked their travel, the procedure to arrange a return flight may vary. It is important for students to follow the correct return booking procedure as policies vary depending on the booking agent and/or carrier. A reminder letter to make return flight plans is sent to students and host families a few months in advance of the student's scheduled departure. In January



and June, international flights fill quickly. If students wait too long before making return reservations, they face the possibility of not returning home on their date of choice and even being “wait-listed” for flights. Since AYA does not book return travel, we are not able to rebook or change individual flights or guarantee specific departure dates.

Occasionally, students may be required to spend the night at the airport if their domestic flights do not allow them to arrive in time to meet their international flight or a flight gets delayed or canceled en route. AYA may be able to provide assistance with obtaining hotel accommodations for such students; however, the student is responsible for the cost of any extra nights’ stay.

If students have difficulties with their return reservations, they should call their Local Coordinator or AYA for guidance.

Year-End Release Form

Students should return home shortly after school ends and no more than one week with express permission from the host family. Student visas are adjusted to reflect the last day of the school year, which is the official end of the Academic Year in America program. Students who wish to travel with natural family at the end of the AYA program must sign a Program Year-End Release Form which officially releases them from the care of the AYA program. Once they are signed off from the program and in the care of their natural parents, they are responsible for arranging return travel in compliance with J-1 visa regulations.

End-of-Program Visa Regulations

In compliance with federal regulations, AYA is required to maintain accurate records for all exchange visitors for whom we sponsor a visa. When a student leaves the program for any reason (voluntary, involuntary, school ends), AYA will update our SEVIS records to ensure that the student’s end-date is properly recorded, at which time the technical grace period will begin. For any student leaving more than 15 days prior to the end date listed on their DS2019 form, AYA will update that student’s SEVIS record, and that new date will begin the technical grace period for that student. Students are responsible for reporting accurate departure dates and complying with all end-of-year program guidelines. Students who do not comply with end-of-year departure procedures are at risk for encountering travel complications when they depart and/or attempt to re-enter the U.S. outside of visa guidelines.

Final Reminders

You and your student will find it hard to believe that the semester or year has come to an end. Here is a reminder checklist to go over with your students at least 2 weeks prior to departure::

- Confirm return flight date and time
- Gather and secure passport and all necessary travel documents
- Pay any outstanding bills including medical claims, cell phone bills, etc.
- *Convalidate grades if necessary
- Write thank you letters to teachers, Local Coordinators, and other significant people
- Pack and weigh luggage to ensure it is within airline weight

limits (contact airlines for more details). If luggage is over airline weight limits, students should plan to incur an extra cost or make other plans for shipping.

*Convalidation

Students from certain countries may need to take specific courses while in the U.S. and must obtain certain paperwork before they leave to earn academic credit in their home country for their time in the U.S. Each country has its own specifications. All students are given this information before they leave home and should know what they need to do to convalidate. It is each student’s responsibility to obtain the necessary paperwork from their schools and respective consulates and should allow enough time to make these arrangements before they leave the U.S.

Returning Home

A great amount of information has been written on culture shock, homesickness, and creating a bond with the host family. The adjustment that will need to be made after the student returns to their home country is just as crucial to prepare for. Also known as re-entry shock, Reverse Culture Shock (RCS) is used to describe the disorientation and adaptation that occurs when one is trying to readjust to their own culture after spending an extended period of time in a different culture.

Almost all students and host families experience RCS to some degree. For some it is minor, and for others, it is a significant part of their return experience. Here is some information that will help answer your questions about the end experience. AYA recommends that you share and discuss this information with your student.

Reverse Culture Shock (RCS)

- RCS is often overlooked or dismissed; only a few people/ students expect problems readjusting to home.
- RCS is characterized by stages similar to those of culture shock.
- For many, RCS can be much more difficult than initial culture shock.
- RCS is different for everyone; the more intense the overseas experience, the more difficult RCS can be.
- RCS cannot be avoided, but it can be managed.
- RCS affects both the student and the host family before and after the student departs.

Why does RCS occur?

- People and places have changed.
- The student has changed and sees things with new eyes.
- There is a gap in information; life did not stand still, waiting for the student to return.
- People may not be as interested in hearing about the student’s experiences as he/she is in sharing them.
- Few expect to have trouble adjusting to home and therefore do not prepare.

An awareness of the feelings and behaviors most commonly associated with RCS can help you and your student prepare for your own experience. Knowing what to expect and knowing that certain feelings are normal can make the experience less stressful and more manageable.



Typical student feelings and behaviors as a result of RCS before and after departure:

- Excited to be going home
- Sad that host family is making plans beyond their stay
- Tendency to withdraw from the host family; it may seem easier to say goodbye if the student does not feel as close to their host family
- Confused that the host family may be pulling away from them
- Honeymoon period initially when returning home; it is so great to be back and see everyone
- Tendency to compare everything to the U.S.; others are not interested in these comparisons
- “Homesick” for the U.S.
- Take the best of American culture and develop lifelong relationship with host family
- Typical host family feelings and behaviors as a result of RCS before and after departure:
- Sad that the student is making plans for after they get home
- Looking forward to some privacy
- Tendency to withdraw from the student; it may seem easier to say goodbye if you do not feel as close to the student
- Frustrated that the student may be withdrawing from you
- Sense of relief once the student is gone
- Dealing with withdrawal; sense of grief at the loss of the student
- Develop lifelong relationship with the student

Here are some suggested coping strategies for your family and your student to utilize before and after departure. If you put some of these practices in place, you will be more prepared to face the challenges that RCS presents.

Coping strategies for students and host families while the students are still in the U.S.:

- Recognize RCS; be aware of the typical stages.
- Communicate. Students and host families should talk about it and discuss the inevitability of the departure. When making future plans beyond the program, acknowledge that it may be difficult for the other party to hear about it.

- Understand that the way the other is behaving may be a subconscious result of RCS.
- Students and host families should be aware of news, changes, and trends within the students’ home community, city, and country.
- Bring closure to your experience; say “goodbye” and “thank you,” make a scrapbook together, and make plans for continuing your relationship.
- Discuss expectations for the student’s return home and whether or not they are realistic.

Coping strategies for students and host families once the students have returned home:

- Be patient with yourself; adjustment takes time.
- Students: Realize that most people will not be as interested in your experiences as you are; be sure to express interest in others’ lives as well.
- Students: Connect with other study abroad students and host families who might be going through a similar adjustment.
- Students: Share your perspectives and expertise with community and school groups interested in learning about the U.S., American culture, or the English language.
- Host families: Share your perspectives with others about your student’s country, culture, and/or language.
- Students: Be a mentor to others who are planning to study abroad or are currently abroad.
- Host families: Be a mentor for other host families.
- Students: Encourage your family to host another exchange student.
- Get involved in the international community in your locale; help an exchange student or host family in your community, using the experience you gained as an exchange student or host family yourself.
- Reflect; keep a journal or make a scrapbook.
- Stay in touch to continue the lifelong relationship you have been building with one another.

Setting up for Success!

Host Family and Student Expectations Worksheet

Setting clear expectations is the key to a successful home-stay experience for both a student and a Host Family. AYA strongly encourages host families and students to take the time to complete this worksheet together **within 72 hours** of the student's arrival. Take this opportunity to discuss personal and cultural differences and establish common goals, clear expectations, and a strong foundation for success!

Make sure that everyone understands what is expected of them, and that notes are written clearly and in language that everyone can understand. Choose a central location and post the completed worksheet in a visible location so everyone remembers what was discussed.

Meals

	Time	Eaten Together /Eaten Individually	Comments
Breakfast	_____	_____	_____
Lunch	_____	_____	_____
Dinner	_____	_____	_____
Snacks	_____	_____	_____

School Lunch

Does student take a lunch or buy it? _____

(Reminder, student pays for lunch if choosing to buy. HF pays if requiring student to buy)

Who makes lunch if taken from the house? _____

Where can food be eaten in the home?

Are there any rooms in which food cannot be eaten? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, which rooms? _____

Does the student or family have any food allergies or dietary restrictions? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what are they? _____

If the student wishes to purchase specialized food that the host family would not typically buy, who should they organize this with, how should they pay for the food, and where should it be stored?

Laundry

Has the student been taught how to use your washer/dryer yet? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Where should dirty clothes be placed? _____

Are there set days when laundry is to be done? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what days? _____

Who is responsible for sorting, washing, drying, folding, ironing, hand washing? _____

Smartphones and Electronics

Is there a specific place where electronics are kept to charge overnight? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What are the appropriate times for phone calls? _____

What are the inappropriate times for phone calls? _____

Can the student bring their cell phone to school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How will the student pay for their cell phone plan? (Reminder, to simplify relationships, students should not be added to a family plan)

Are there restrictions on cell phone usage, including texting, social media, etc.? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what are the rules? _____

What are the appropriate times for electronics usage? _____

What are the inappropriate times for electronics usage? _____

Are there restrictions regarding websites, downloading, and information sharing (like location)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what are the restrictions? _____

What should the student know about internet safety and protecting the privacy of the student and family? _____

AYA recommends that communication with friends and family back home should be limited to a reasonable amount (recommended once a week) to help avoid hindering adjustment and increasing homesickness.

Student Room

Can the student put pictures on the wall? ☐ Yes ☐ No

☐ With nails?

☐ With tape?

☐ Other?

Can the furniture arrangement be changed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Who cleans? _____

How often? _____

Bathroom

Has the student been taught how the faucets and fixtures work yet? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Where does the student's towel go? _____

Where should the student's toiletries be placed? _____

Are toiletries to be shared? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Is there a limit on showers? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how many per day? _____

If yes, what is the time limit? _____

Is there a scheduled morning/evening bathroom time for the student? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what is it _____

How should the bathroom be left? (i.e., door open, bath mat on rack) _____

Household Chores

Who sets the table, clears the table, does dishes, cooks meals? _____

Who cleans up after snacks? _____

Who tidies up the bathroom? _____ How often? _____

What other chores will the student be expected to share? _____

Household Rules

How should student proceed when scheduling activities? _____

Should student get host parent permission? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How do you organize and share information about schedules, events, etc? _____

Are there days or times when activities are not allowed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what days? _____

How far in advance does the student need to notify you of plans outside the home? _____

How far in advance should the student request a ride/transportation to and from an activity or event? _____

Is student allowed to ride in cars driven by teenage drivers? ☐ Yes ☐ No

(Reminder, students are not permitted to use ride-hailing services like Uber or Lyft without a host parent)

With permission? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Without permission? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does student need permission to stay after school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Can the student invite friends over? ☐ Yes ☐ No

With permission? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Without permission? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How much notice? _____

Can the student go out with friends during the week? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, when? _____

Can the student go out with friends on weekends? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, when? _____

What is the student's curfew on weekdays? _____ Weekends? _____

Does the student need to contact host parents if plans change? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does Host Family need to know where student is at all times? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How will student be required to notify host parents of whereabouts/change of plans?

☐ Phone call

☐ Text message

Are there certain family activities the student will be expected to participate in? ☐ Yes ☐ No

(For example, sporting events, community events, game night)

If yes, what events? _____

Dating Rules

What are the rules regarding dating? _____

What are the rules regarding spending time with a potential date inside and outside of the home? _____

Are there any dating restrictions? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what are the restrictions? _____

Religious Services

Do family members participate in weekly services? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what time? _____

Do family members participate in other regular religious services? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, when? _____

Do family members participate in youth group activities? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, when? _____

Does the student wish to attend with family ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, how often? _____

Does the student wish to attend a different religious service? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Who will provide transportation? _____

Do all parties understand that the student and family
do not necessarily share the same faith or belief systems? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do all parties understand that despite differing beliefs,
all should be respectful and open to learning and observing different faiths? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How will you handle differences in faith? (Discussion, taking turns going to services, compromise) _____

Who Pays

When the family goes to the movies, bowling, sight-seeing, etc.? _____

When the family plans a trip or vacation? _____

Remember, AYA students are not expected to pay for food (except for specialty snacks or foods the Host Family does not normally eat, hot lunch at school if the student does not wish to take a packed lunch from home) gas, tolls, or utilities.

Travel & Holidays

Is the Host Family planning on traveling during the year? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does the Host Family observe certain traditions during holidays? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what are they? _____

Student Safety

Is there anything the student should know about the safe or less safe areas of this part of town? _____

Are there any areas to avoid walking in or going to during the day and/or night? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what areas? _____

How should an emergency or fire be handled? _____

What are the phone numbers of related emergency services? _____

Emergencies: 911

Police Department: _____ Fire Department: _____

Hospital: _____

How does the Host Family secure the home?

☐ Locking all doors and windows ☐ Alarm system

Are there any special safety precautions that the student needs to take related to closing/locking certain doors, house keys, etc.?

If home alone, how should the student handle phone calls or someone at the door? _____

What should the student know about traffic and pedestrian safety? _____

What should the student do if they get lost or don't have a key and nobody's home? _____

Are there any activities, people, or places the student should avoid? _____

What should the student do if they are out with friends and find themselves in an unsafe situation?
(underaged drinking, drugs, risky behaviors)

Are all parties aware that drinking alcohol is strictly prohibited according to U.S. law and AYA program rules and is not permitted under any circumstance, in or outside of the home? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are all parties aware that AYA is a non-smoking program and that students are prohibited from possessing or smoking vapes, e-cigarettes, or cigarettes while on-program? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Have all parties been made aware of safety precautions related to sexual abuse and exploitation? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What should the student do if they are ever the subject of any type of misconduct, physical, sexual, or otherwise, including lewd or inappropriate solicitations via phone, text, email, or social media communication?

Communication

Student: What is the best way for your host family to address unmet expectations with you?

Host Family: What is the best way for your student to ask for help, clarification, or support from you?

Other Household Guidelines



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



BridgeUSA

January 3, 2025

Dear American Host Family:

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Rebecca A. Pasini
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Private Sector Exchange

Reprint from the Code of Federal Regulations

Washington, D.C. 20547

Criteria for Exchange Teenager Program
sec. 22 CFR 62.25 Secondary school
students

PART 62—EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM

■ 1. The Authority citation for part 62 is revised to read as follows:

Authority: 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(15)(J), 1182, 1184, 1258; 22 U.S.C. 1431–1442, 2451 et seq.; Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998, Pub. L. 105–277, Div. G, 112 Stat. 2681 et seq.; Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1977, 3 CFR, 1977 Comp. p. 200; E.O. 12048 of March 27, 1978; 3 CFR, 1978 Comp. p. 168; the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, Pub. L. 104–208, Div. C, 110 Stat. 3009–546, as amended; Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (USA PATRIOT ACT) (Pub. L. 107–56), Section 416, 115 Stat. 354; and the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002, Pub. L. 107–173; 116 Stat. 543.

■ 2. Section 62.25 is revised to read as follows:

§ 62.25 Secondary school students.

(a) Purpose. This section governs Department of State designated exchange visitor programs under which foreign secondary school students are afforded the opportunity to study in the United States at accredited public or private secondary schools for an academic semester or an academic year, while living with American host families or residing at accredited U.S. boarding schools.

(b) Program sponsor eligibility. Eligibility for designation as a secondary school student exchange visitor program sponsor is limited to organizations:

(1) With tax-exempt status as conferred by the Internal Revenue Service pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; and

(2) Which are United States citizens as such term is defined in § 62.2.

(c) Program eligibility. Secondary school student exchange visitor programs designated by the Department of State must:

(1) Require all exchange students to be enrolled and participating in a full course of study at an accredited academic institution;

(2) Allow entry of exchange students for not less than one academic semester (or quarter equivalency) and not more than two academic semesters (or quarter equivalency) duration; and

(3) Ensure that the program is conducted on a U.S. academic calendar year basis, except for students from countries whose academic year is opposite that of the United States. Exchange students may begin an exchange program in the second semester of a U.S. academic year only if specifically permitted to do so, in writing, by the school in which the exchange student is enrolled. In all cases, sponsors must notify both the Host Family and school prior to the exchange student's arrival in the United States whether the placement is for an academic semester, an academic year, or a calendar year.

(d) Program administration. Sponsors must ensure that all organizational officers, employees, representatives, agents, and volunteers acting on their behalf:

(1) Are adequately trained. Sponsors must administer training for local coordinators that specifically includes, at a minimum, instruction in: Conflict resolution; procedures for handling and reporting emergency situations; aware-

ness or knowledge of child safety standards; information on sexual conduct codes; procedures for handling and reporting allegations of sexual misconduct or any other allegations of abuse or neglect; and the criteria to be used to screen potential host families and exercise good judgment when identifying what constitutes suitable Host Family placements. In addition to their own training, sponsors must ensure that all local coordinators complete the Department of State mandated training module prior to their appointment as a local coordinator or assumption of duties. The Department of State training module will include instruction designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Exchange Visitor Program; its public diplomacy objectives; and the Secondary School Student category rules and regulations. Sponsors must demonstrate the individual's successful completion of all initial training requirements and that annual refresher training is also successfully completed.

(2) Are adequately supervised. Sponsors must create and implement organization-specific standard operating procedures for the supervision of local coordinators designed to prevent or deter fraud, abuse, or misconduct in the performance of the duties of these employees/agents/volunteers. They must also have sufficient internal controls to ensure that such employees/agents/volunteers comply with such standard operating procedures.

(3) Have been vetted annually through a criminal background check (which must include a search of the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Registry);

(4) Place no exchange student with his or her relatives;

(5) Make no exchange student placement beyond 120 miles of the home of the local coordinator authorized to act on the sponsor's behalf in both routine and emergency matters arising from that exchange student's participation in the Exchange Visitor Program;

(6) Make no monetary payments or other incentives to host families;

(7) Provide exchange students with reasonable access to their natural parents and family by telephone and email;

(8) Make certain that the exchange student's government issued documents (i.e., passports, Forms DS–2019) are not removed from his/her possession;

(9) Conduct the Host Family orientation after the Host Family has been fully vetted and accepted;

(10) Refrain, without exception, from acting as:

(i) Both a Host Family and a local coordinator or area supervisor for an exchange student;

(ii) A Host Family for one sponsor and a local coordinator for another sponsor; or

(iii) A local coordinator for any exchange student over whom he/she has a position of trust or authority such as the student's teacher or principal. This requirement is not applicable to a boarding school placement.

(11) Maintain, at minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the exchange student. The first monthly contact between the local coordinator and the exchange student must be in person. All other contacts may take place in-person, on the phone, or via electronic mail and must be properly documented. The sponsor is responsible for ensuring that issues raised through such contacts are promptly and appropriately addressed.

(12) That a sponsor representative other than the local coordinator who recruited, screened and selected the Host Family visit the exchange student/Host Family home within the first or second month following the student's placement in the home.

(13) Maintain, at a minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the Host Family. At least once during the fall semester and at least once during the spring semester, (i.e., twice during the academic year) the con-

tact by the local coordinator with the Host Family must be in person. All other contacts may take place in person, on the phone, or via electronic mail and must be properly documented. The sponsor is responsible for ensuring the issues raised through such contacts are promptly and appropriately addressed.

(14) That host schools are provided contact information for the local organizational representative (including name, direct phone number, and e-mail address), the program sponsor, and the Department's Office of Designation; and

(15) Adhere to all regulatory provisions set forth in this Part and all additional terms and conditions governing program administration that the Department may impose.

(e) Student selection. In addition to satisfying the requirements of § 62.10(a), sponsors must ensure that all participants in a designated secondary school student exchange visitor program:

(1) Are secondary school students in their home countries who have not completed more than 11 years of primary and secondary study, exclusive of kindergarten; or are at least 15 years of age, but not more than 18 years and six months of age as of the program start date;

(2) Demonstrate maturity, good character, and scholastic aptitude; and

(3) Have not previously participated in an academic year or semester secondary school student exchange program in the United States or attended school in the United States in either F–1 or J–1 visa status.

(f) Student enrollment. (1) Sponsors must secure prior written acceptance for the enrollment of any exchange student in a United States public or private secondary school. Such prior acceptance must:

(i) Be secured from the school principal or other authorized school administrator of the school or school system that the exchange student will attend; and

(ii) Include written arrangements concerning the payment of tuition or waiver thereof if applicable.

(2) Under no circumstance may a sponsor facilitate the entry into the United States of an exchange student for whom a written school placement has not been secured.

(3) Under no circumstance may a sponsor charge a student private school tuition if such arrangements are not finalized in writing prior to the issuance of Form DS–2019.

(4) Sponsors must maintain copies of all written acceptances for a minimum of three years and make such documents available for Department of State inspection upon request.

(5) Sponsors must provide the school with a translated "written English language summary" of the exchange student's complete academic course work prior to commencement of school, in addition to any additional documents the school may require. Sponsors must inform the prospective host school of any student who has completed secondary school in his/her home country.

(6) Sponsors may not facilitate the enrollment of more than five exchange students in one school unless the school itself has requested, in writing, the placement of more than five students from the sponsor.

(7) Upon issuance of a Form DS–2019 to a prospective participant, the sponsor accepts full responsibility for securing a school and Host Family placement for the student, except in cases of voluntary student withdrawal or visa denial.

(g) Student orientation. In addition to the orientation requirements set forth at § 62.10, all sponsors must provide exchange students, prior to their departure from their home countries, with the following information:

(1) A summary of all operating procedures, rules, and regulations governing student participation in the exchange visitor program along with a detailed summary of travel ar-

rangements;

(2) A copy of the Department's welcome letter to exchange students;

(3) Age and language appropriate information on how to identify and report sexual abuse or exploitation;

(4) A detailed profile of the Host Family with whom the exchange student will be placed. The profile must state whether the Host Family is either a permanent placement or a temporary arrival family;

(5) A detailed profile of the school and community in which the exchange student will be placed. The profile must state whether the student will pay tuition; and

(6) An identification card, that lists the exchange student's name, United States Host Family placement address and telephone numbers (landline and cellular), sponsor name and main office and emergency telephone numbers, name and telephone numbers (landline and cellular) of the local coordinator and area representative, the telephone number of Department's Office of Designation, and the Secondary School Student program toll free emergency telephone number. The identification card must also contain the name of the health insurance provider and policy number. Such cards must be corrected, reprinted, and issued to the student if changes in contact information occur due to a change in the student's placement.

(h) Student extra-curricular activities. Exchange students may participate in school sanctioned and sponsored extracurricular activities, including athletics, if such participation is:

(1) Authorized by the local school district in which the student is enrolled; and

(2) Authorized by the state authority responsible for determination of athletic eligibility, if applicable. Sponsors shall not knowingly be party to a placement (inclusive of direct placements) based on athletic abilities, whether initiated by a student, a natural or Host Family, a school, or any other interested party.

(3) Any placement in which either the student or the sending organization in the foreign country is party to an arrangement with any other party, including receiving school personnel, whereby the student will attend a particular school or live with a particular Host Family must be reported to the particular school and the National Federation of State High School Associations prior to the first day of classes.

(i) Student employment. Exchange students may not be employed on either a full or part-time basis but may accept sporadic or intermittent employment such as babysitting or yard work.

(j) Host family application and selection. Sponsors must adequately screen and select all potential host families and at a minimum must:

(1) Provide potential host families with a detailed summary of the Exchange Visitor Program and of their requirements, obligations and commitment to host;

(2) Utilize a standard application form developed by the sponsor that includes, at a minimum, all data fields provided in Appendix F, "Information to be Collected on Secondary School Student Host Family Applications". The form must include a statement stating that: "The income data collected will be used solely for the purposes of determining that the basic needs of the exchange student can be met, including three quality meals and transportation to and from school activities." Such application form must be signed and dated at the time of application by all potential Host Family applicants. The Host Family application must be designed to provide a detailed summary and profile of the Host Family, the physical home environment (to include photographs of the Host Family home's exterior and grounds, kitchen, student's bedroom, bathroom, and family or living room), family composition, and community environment. Exchange students

are not permitted to reside with their relatives.

(3) Conduct an in-person interview with all family members residing in the home where the student will be living;

(4) Ensure that the Host Family is capable of providing a comfortable and nurturing home environment and that the home is clean and sanitary; that the exchange student's bedroom contains a separate bed for the student that is neither convertible nor inflatable in nature; and that the student has adequate storage space for clothes and personal belongings, reasonable access to bathroom facilities, study space if not otherwise available in the house and reasonable, unimpeded access to the outside of the house in the event of a fire or similar emergency. An exchange student may share a bedroom, but with no more than one other individual of the same sex.

(5) Ensure that the Host Family has a good reputation and character by securing two personal references from within the community from individuals who are not relatives of the potential Host Family or representatives of the sponsor (i.e., field staff or volunteers), attesting to the Host Family's good reputation and character;

(6) Ensure that the Host Family has adequate financial resources to undertake hosting obligations and is not receiving needs-based government subsidies for food or housing;

(7) Verify that each member of the Host Family household 18 years of age and older, as well as any new adult member added to the household, or any member of the Host Family household who will turn eighteen years of age during the exchange student's stay in that household, has undergone a criminal background check (which must include a search of the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Registry);

(8) Maintain a record of all documentation on a student's exchange program, including but not limited to application forms, background checks, evaluations, and interviews, for all selected host families for a period of three years following program completion; and

(9) Ensure that a potential single adult host parent without a child in the home undergoes a secondary level review by an organizational representative other than the individual who recruited and selected the applicant. Such secondary review should include demonstrated evidence of the individual's friends or family who can provide an additional support network for the exchange student and evidence of the individual's ties to his/her community. Both the exchange student and his or her natural parents must agree in writing in advance of the student's placement with a single adult host parent without a child in the home.

(k) Host family orientation. In addition to the orientation requirements set forth in § 62.10, sponsors must:

(1) Inform all host families of the philosophy, rules, and regulations governing the sponsor's exchange visitor program, including examples of "best practices" developed by the exchange community;

(2) Provide all selected host families with a copy of the Department's letter of appreciation to host families;

(3) Provide all selected host families with a copy of Department of State promulgated Exchange Visitor Program regulations;

(4) Advise all selected host families of strategies for cross-cultural interaction and conduct workshops to familiarize host families with cultural differences and practices; and

(5) Advise host families of their responsibility to inform the sponsor of any and all material changes in the status of the Host Family or student, including, but not limited to, changes in address, finances, employment and criminal arrests.

(l) Host family placement. (1) Sponsors must secure, prior to the student's departure from his or her home country, a permanent

or arrival Host Family placement for each exchange student participant. Sponsors may not:

(i) Facilitate the entry into the United States of an exchange student for whom a Host Family placement has not been secured;

(ii) Place more than one exchange student with a Host Family without the express prior written consent of the Host Family, the natural parents, and the students being placed. Under no circumstance may more than two exchange students be placed with a Host Family, or in the home of a local coordinator, regional coordinator, or volunteer. Sponsors may not place students from the same countries or with the same native languages in a single home.

(2) Prior to the student's departure from his or her home country, sponsors must advise both the exchange student and Host Family, in writing, of the respective family compositions and backgrounds of each, whether the Host Family placement is a permanent or arrival placement, and facilitate and encourage the exchange of correspondence between the two.

(3) In the event of unforeseen circumstances that necessitate a change of Host Family placement, the sponsor must document the reason(s) necessitating such change and provide the Department of State with an annual statistical summary reflecting the number and reason(s) for such change in Host Family placement in the program's annual report.

(m) Advertising and Marketing for the recruitment of host families. In addition to the requirements set forth in § 62.9 in advertising and promoting for Host Family recruiting, sponsors must:

(1) Utilize only promotional materials that professionally, ethically, and accurately reflect the sponsor's purposes, activities, and sponsorship;

(2) Not publicize the need for host families via any public media with announcements, notices, advertisements, etc. that are not sufficiently in advance of the exchange student's arrival, appeal to public pity or guilt, imply in any way that an exchange student will be denied participation if a Host Family is not found immediately, or identify photos of individual exchange students and include an appeal for an immediate family;

(3) Not promote or recruit for their programs in any way that compromises the privacy, safety or security of participants, families, or schools. Specifically, sponsors shall not include personal student data or contact information (including addresses, phone numbers or email addresses) or photographs of the student on Web sites or in other promotional materials; and

(4) Ensure that access to exchange student photographs and personally identifying information, either online or in print form, is only made available to potential host families who have been fully vetted and selected for program participation. Such information, if available online, must also be password protected.

(n) Reporting requirements. Along with the annual report required by regulations set forth at § 62.15, sponsors must file with the Department of State the following information:

(1) Sponsors must immediately report to the Department any incident or allegation involving the actual or alleged sexual exploitation or any other allegations of abuse or neglect of an exchange student. Sponsors must also report such allegations as required by local or state statute or regulation. Failure to report such incidents to the Department and, as required by state law or regulation, to local law enforcement authorities shall be grounds for the suspension and revocation of the sponsor's Exchange Visitor Program designation;

(2) A report of all final academic year and semester program participant placements by August 31 for the upcoming academic year or January 31 for the Spring semester and calendar year. The report must be in the format directed by the Department and must include at

a minimum, the exchange student's full name, Form DS-2019 number (SEVIS ID #), Host Family placement (current U.S. address), school (site of activity) address, the local coordinator's name and zip code, and other information the Department may request; and

(3) A report of all situations which resulted in the placement of an exchange student with more than one Host Family or in more than one school. The report must be in a format directed by the Department and include, at a minimum, the exchange student's full name, Form DS-2019 number (SEVIS ID #), Host Family placements (current U.S. address), schools (site of activity address), the reason for the change in placement, and the date of the move. This report is due by July 31 for the previous academic school year.

A new Appendix F is added to Part 62, as follows:

Appendix F to Part 62—Information To Be Collected on Secondary School Student Host Family Applications

Basic Family Information:

a. Host Family Member—Full name and relationship (children and adults) either living full-time or part-time in the home or who frequently stay at the home)

b. Date of Birth (DOB) of all family members

c. Street Address

d. Contact information (telephone; e-mail address) of host parents

e. Employment—employer name, job title, and point of contact for each working resident of the home

f. Is the residence the site of a functioning business? (e.g., daycare, farm)

g. Description of each household member (e.g., level of education, profession, interests, community involvement, and relevant behavioral or other characteristics of such household members that could affect the successful integration of the exchange visitor into the household)

h. Has any member of your household ever been charged with any crime? Household Pets:

a. Number of Pets

b. Type of Pets

Financial Resources:

a. Average Annual Income Range: Less than \$25,000; \$25,000–\$35,000; \$35,000–\$45,000; \$45,000–\$55,000; \$55,000–\$65,000; \$65,000–\$75,000; and \$75,000 and above. Note: The form must include a statement stating that: "The income data collected will be used solely for the purposes of ensuring that the basic needs of the exchange students can be met, including three quality meals and transportation to and from school activities"

b. Describe if anyone residing in the home receives any kind of public assistance (financial needs-based government subsidies for food or housing)

c. Identify those personal expenses expected to be covered by the student Diet:

a. Does anyone in the family follow any dietary restrictions? (Y/N) If yes, describe:

b. Do you expect the student to follow any dietary restrictions? (Y/N) If yes, describe:

c. Would you feel comfortable hosting a student who follows a particular dietary restriction (ex. Vegetarian, Vegan, etc.)? (Y/N)

d. Would the family provide three (3) square meals daily?

High School Information:

a. Name and address of school (private or public school)

b. Name, address, e-mail and telephone number of school official

c. Approximate size of the school student body

d. Approximate distance between the school and your home

e. Approximate start date of the school year

f. How will the exchange student get to the school (e.g. bus, carpool, walk)?

g. Would the family provide special transportation for extracurricular activities after

school or in the evenings, if required?

h. Which, if any, of your family's children, presently attend the school in which the exchange visitor is enrolled?

If applicable list sports/clubs/activities, if any, your child(ren) participate(s) in at the school

i. Does any member of your household work for the high school in a coaching/teaching/or administrative capacity?

j. Has any member of your household had contact with a coach regarding the hosting of an exchange student with particular athletic ability?

If yes, please describe the contact and sport.

Community Information:

a. In what type of community do you live (e.g.: Urban, Suburban, Rural, Farm)

b. Population of community

c. Nearest Major City (Distance and population)

d. Nearest Airport (Distance)

e. City or town website

f. Briefly describe your neighborhood and community

g. What points of interest are near your area (parks, museums, historical sites)?

h. Areas in or near neighborhood to be avoided?

Home Description:

a. Describe your type of home (e.g. single family home, condominium, duplex, apartment, mobile home) and include photographs of the Host Family home's exterior and grounds, kitchen, student's bedroom, student's bathroom, and family and living areas.

b. Describe Primary Rooms and Bedrooms

c. Number of Bathrooms

d. Will the exchange student share a bedroom? (Y/N) If yes, with which household resident?

e. Describe the student's bedroom

f. Describe amenities to which the student has access

g. Utilities

Family Activities:

a. Language spoken in home

b. Please describe activities and/or sports each family member participates in: (e.g., camping, hiking, dance, crafts, debate, drama, art, music, reading, soccer, baseball, horseback riding)

c. Describe your expectations regarding the responsibilities and behavior of the student while in your home (e.g., homework, household chores, curfew (school night and weekend), access to refrigerator and food, drinking of alcoholic beverages, driving, smoking, computer/Internet/E-Mail)

Would you be willing voluntarily to inform the exchange visitor in advance of any religious affiliations of household members? (Y/N)

Would any member of the household have difficulty hosting a student whose religious beliefs were different from their own? (Y/N)

Note: A Host Family may want the exchange visitor to attend one or more religious services or programs with the family. The exchange visitor cannot be required to do so, but may decide to experience this facet of U.S. culture at his or her discretion.

How did you learn about being a Host Family?

References:

Dated: October 21, 2010

Sally J. Lawrence,
Director, Office of Designation, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State.

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