

HOST ORIENTATION

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Part 2: Preparing For The First Month

The primary role a Host Family fulfills is to serve as the student’s home away from home. In order to do that successfully, you need to understand that their home culture is vastly different than your own. It’s helpful to assume that you will need to teach, and re-teach, the student how to navigate your American home and culture in order to ensure a positive experience together.

TRYING NEW FOODS! Many international students (especially minors) are not accustomed to American food. Remember to keep an open mind when eating together and exploring their likes and dislikes. Your student should be willing to try new foods but initially may not eat much. Continue to serve meals you are normally accustomed to preparing; but, if they show interest in doing so, try to involve them in the process of menu planning, grocery shopping and meal preparation. Conversations about food are always a great gateway to learning more about each other’s cultures and better understanding how to meal plan throughout the year.

TEACHING HOUSE RULES! It is important to make time to outline and discuss House Rules during the first few days after your student’s arrival. It is much easier to establish rules if you introduce them to the student when they first arrive so that the student can adjust to them as part of their new environment. Typically, students have a harder time adjusting to new rules enacted after they have been in your home for a month or two, so preparation on your part prior to their arrival is key. House Rules should cover topics such as protocols for classmates or friends visiting, internet and electronics usage, household chores and bedroom cleaning, using kitchen/home appliances, doing laundry, and requesting rides for extracurricular activities. Remember: Your student is coming from a culture vastly different from yours where values and expectations of behavior may stand in stark contrast to your own. Be patient and consistent when establishing your House Rules, giving time and space for adjustment. Pick and choose your battles - let go of the non-essentials and focus on the non-negotiables. See your Host Handbook for detailed guidelines around these topics.

TALK FAMILY SCHEDULES! Family schedules may dictate bathroom use, meal times, internet curfew, school transportation and household chores – don’t wait to communicate the schedule to your student but make sure this is part of your home orientation during the first few days after arrival. Let your student know how much advance notice you need for driving him/her to the mall or inviting friends over so he/she will not be caught off-guard if you say no or later.

ELECTRONICS AT THE DINNER TABLE: If you don’t allow phones at the table during meals, make sure this is clear from the start. Have a basket or pre-established place where everyone puts their phones before sitting down to share meals.

NIGHT/QUIET HOURS: Because of the time zone change, the window of time during which your student can connect with family and friends back home often falls during “quiet time” hours. Student’s parents will often call them every day to check in on them. If late night noise may cause an issue in your home (for instance, if bedrooms are close together), set a time, such as 11 pm, by which all phone calls/Skyping must be finished and communicate this to your Homestay Coordinator so that we can get word to parents.

FOOD STORED AND/OR EATEN IN BEDROOMS: In order to avoid damage to furniture and insect/rodent infestations, create a storage space in the kitchen marked with your student’s name and explain clearly that his/her snack food is to be stored in that special spot and consumed only in the designated area(s).

SHOWER/BATHROOM TIMES: Show your student how to seal the shower curtain inside the tub to avoid flooding the bathroom floor when they take showers. Additionally, please show them where they can find extra towels or rags to clean up if they make a mess and where to put those towels when they are done. Many cultures have a room entirely dedicated to bathing where a leisurely amount of time is spent and water drains away through a floor drain without any clean-up necessary. Set up a morning/evening shower schedule if needed.

TIME MANAGEMENT: Students and teenagers are not the best at time management. Establish a schedule for school transportation (if providing) and clearly communicate (verbally and posted in writing) what time you will be leaving the home each day for drop off. If your student is routinely making you, or other students late, contact your Homestay Coordinator for options which may include letting the student take Uber if they do not wake up on time.

MESSY BEDROOM & LAUNDRY: Recognize this may be your student’s first time doing housework and laundry. Don’t expect perfection; be satisfied with “livable conditions.” You will need to walk your student through each new task several times before he/she should be expected to complete it on their own. Establish a set time for bedroom/bathroom cleaning and laundry. Turning off the internet is often a good motivation until the expected chore or task is completed. Some hosts deal with a messy student’s bedroom by simply keeping the door closed.

INTERNET CURFEW: Many students will stay up all night playing video games or chatting with friends online. We encourage all host families to set up a guest internet network before your student’s arrival which can be switched off at a set time each night. Ask your internet service provider for Instructions for setting up a guest network on your modem.

Resources:

- Visit our [Pinterest page](#) for sample recipes
- Download Host Handbook
- Download House Rules Template
- Download MIF Code of Conduct (Student Rules)

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