

The operative word here is *Family*, and we ask you to help your exchange student become a part of your family during the period that he or she lives with you. That means treating this young person as you would your own son or daughter, not as a guest, and exercising all of the **parental responsibilities and authorities** you would for your own child. While many factors will influence to what extent you may need to focus on this role, such as your own experience as a host parent, ages of your own children, and whether you are the first, middle, or final host family for this student, here are some suggestions that previous host parents have provided to us:

Establish a clear understanding of expectations soon after your student arrives.

The document *IB9: Interactive First Night Questions* that we provide to both students and host parents that cover most of the topics that will help define those expectations. Cultural differences as well as personality differences often lead to misunderstandings unless these topics are discussed and clarified. Many students will use the questions as a “check-off list” to make sure nothing has been overlooked during the first few days; we suggest that host parents also review this list for any topics that are important to them.

Homesickness can occur at any time in the first six months of an exchange. Be prepared to help your student recover from homesickness. This can take many forms, from simply general sadness to wishing to stay in his or her room alone. It is perfectly normal for Exchange students to have bad days and experience homesickness. If you are sensitive to this, you will be able to reassure your student that their reactions are perfectly normal. Help them to keep busy and involved. These feelings will pass. Suggest to them that they pour out their frustrations in a letter home (often saying they want to return home immediately), suggest that they put it away for a couple days, re-read it, and only then mail it ... if it still applies. Most times the letter will be deleted!

Encourage your student to **get involved**. School extracurricular activities, sports, community activities and family activities may be new and unfamiliar to your student, and could be very “different” from those activities he or she was involved in back home. If you sense that your student is bored and reluctant to participate in available activities, it may simply be because no one has asked him or her to join in. Try to introduce the student to some people who will help overcome this reluctance.

Understand “culture shock”, and help your student learn *our* culture. The sheet entitled *‘L14 - Coping With Culture Shock’* may help you understand some of the feelings your student may experience as a result of the differences between our culture and the one they have known since birth.

Other Information Needed By Host Parents

Medical Matters

Consult with the Student Counsellor about registering the student with a doctor. As host parents, you are asked to make arrangements for medical treatment when necessary, as well as to determine when medical treatment is called for. Your student may be reluctant to discuss medical problems initially, and their own culture, or medical system at home, may be quite different from that which we have, so you may need to patiently ask questions and offer suggestions when you observe conditions that may be medically - based. Many Rotary clubs have arrangements with local medical-services providers (often a member of the Rotary club), and you should be apprised of these arrangements by the Rotary YEO or before a medical problem arises.

It is always advisable to inform the host Rotary club of any medical treatment or medical problems that have occurred so that information is made available to subsequent host families. Serious illnesses or injuries should be made known to the District YE Chair as soon as possible.

Being the First Host Family

While being “first” often provides the greatest challenges for dealing with things like language difficulties and cultural differences, it also provides the opportunity to form a lasting emotional bond with the student that can continue after the student moves on to subsequent host families, since he or she will remain part of your community for the balance of the exchange year.

When the time comes for the student to move on, be prepared for the emotions that come with separation and fear of something new, both for the student and you. It will help to make this transition go smoothly if the student has met the new family, perhaps first in your home, and then later for a visit in the next host family home, to provide opportunities to become familiar with the family and surroundings.

Once your student has moved, maintain contact without undermining the development of relationships with the next family. Inviting your student to share special family events, like birthdays, will reinforce the relationship you developed earlier, and will usually be welcomed by the current host family, just as you welcomed others’ invitations to the student when part of your family.

When it is finally time for your student to return home to his or her own family, they will be leaving not one but several **families** that they will consider “home” for the rest of their lives.

Being the Final Host Family

Being the host family at the conclusion of the exchange year could involve dealing with many of the same emotions the student had upon arrival, but this time caused by the realization that the “familiar” is now *our* culture, and the “unknown” involves *returning home*. Understand that the exchange student **must** return home at the conclusion of the exchange year as a condition of the exchange program. **A sign of a successful exchange is the student’s reluctance to go home, and we wouldn’t want it any other way.**

You may need to help your student prepare mentally for this departure, in addition to the many physical aids that will be needed. **Start by selecting an actual departure date** that everyone involved agrees with (including the student’s parents), and help the student make the necessary airlines reservations. (Although we require all students to have round-trip airlines tickets, some airlines can only book flights 6-9 months in advance, and many students must change the initial return date once they know graduation and Tour dates, etc.). As the departure date approaches, help the student with packing and luggage, recognizing that much has been collected since their arrival, and it may be necessary to ship some of the student’s possessions home to keep suitcases below the airlines’ quantity and weight limits.

Help the student wrap up any financial obligations with you and others, especially regarding long-distance telephone charges. Use of a pre-purchased phone card, or having the student make final calls collect, will minimize phone charges appearing on your telephone bill after the student has departed. Discuss with the student and the Rotary Club Counsellor the return of the student’s emergency fund.

Involve the prior host families, and the host Rotary club, in planning a farewell event before the student departs and allow sufficient flexibility in your schedule during the final few days to provide your student with the opportunity to say goodbye to the many friends made during the past year. In many cases, these “good-byes” will be even harder for the student than those said 11 or 12

months earlier, and your understanding and support will make this a happy time for everyone involved.

Lastly, if there are questions or problems.....

While there is no way we or you can guarantee that every Exchange student and host parent will enjoy a completely successful exchange, we do our best to help them, and you, and the percentage of unsuccessful exchanges is very small. Most problems that do occur can be taken care of satisfactorily *if addressed early*, before they become too big to handle.

IF YOU DO HAVE A CONCERN, AND NEED TO DISCUSS SOMETHING, please contact the local Rotary Club Youth Exchange Officer or the student's Counsellor. If he or she is not available, please contact a member of the District YE Committee. They will get in touch with the student, and if appropriate, the counterpart in the sponsoring district for further information and help, if needed.

Please do not dismiss non-compliance with our rules, or try to solve major problems yourself. Because this is an international program, there may be cultural and/or Rotary subtleties of which you are unaware, and there may also be long-range implications affecting future exchanges. Please call and give us the opportunity to show you that we are as concerned about the exchange student and the host family and club as you are. We can't help you or the student, if we don't know that there is a problem.

So that you can communicate your concerns there is a form *CP10D: Record of Concerns – a form for CYEOs, the Counsellor and the Host Family* available for download from your student's Inbound Student Folder. This is on Dropbox and will have been shared with you by the DYEO. Once completed it should be sent to the DYEO without delay.

While much of this document addresses rules, regulations, and "dealing with problems", we want you to know that being a host parent is also a lot of fun and full of rewards. You will get to know, and love, someone from another country, another culture, and another part of the world. You will have the opportunity to watch, and help shape, the development and maturity of a young person. You will have opportunities to learn of another culture yourself, and in the process of sharing our culture and our country with this student, gain knowledge and understanding for you and your family, and at the end of the exchange, you will have added to your family a son or daughter who may live in a "foreign" country the rest of their life, but will always be a part of **your** family.