



Bay Area International Student Services

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Common Questions Asked by a Prospective Host Family

What does it mean to be a host family?

The most important quality we look for in a host family is the genuine desire to open your home to an international high school exchange student and *to treat your student as you would a member of your own family*, and sharing your faith as a natural part of your life.

All host families believe in the importance of cross-cultural exchange and are eager to learn about other countries and cultures as well as to share their American way of life with their student. Host families do not need to have a teenager in their home to qualify but families with children or those with extensive experience with teenagers are preferred. If no children are in the home the host family might be asked to host two students at one time.

Qualities that are sought in a host family are friendliness, warmth, flexibility, and financial stability. The socio-economic or educational level of the family is not as important as the family's willingness to share and learn with their exchange student.

Who can be a host family?

Host families are as different and diverse as Americans themselves. They come from all ethnic, racial, economic, and religious backgrounds. They live in cities, small towns, and suburbs. You don't need to have teenagers to host. In fact, any two people related by blood or marriage can be a host family—whether you have young children, adult children, or no children at all. Families that have teenagers or have worked extensively with teenagers will be given preference.

What are the requirements to be a host family?

Our desire is to place our students in loving Christian homes where they can grow socially, academically, and spiritually. In order to accelerate their English proficiency, we prefer primarily English speaking families.

Do host families receive compensation for hosting?

All host families are volunteers. However, each host family will receive a monthly stipend to assist in the added cost of hosting a student. Exchange students bring their own spending money and are expected to pay for souvenirs and personal items.

How long is the Host Family Program?

Our host families have different levels of commitment. Typically, our exchange students live with a host family, for a full year, a school year or a semester. All students arrive approximately one to two weeks before school begins. The full academic year students arrive in early August. The spring semester students arrive in early January. We do have need for short-term host families who can host a student for the summer months or on a temporary basis (up to 2 weeks).

If I agree to host a student on one occasion, am I obligated to do so again?

No, students' stays with host families are arranged for one school year or semester at a time.

What kind of support will we receive?

Your International Student Services (ISS) staff is sensitive to both the needs of the host family and to the needs of your exchange student. The ISS staff will provide orientations, answer questions and offer support. On the occasion when your Student Services personnel may not be available, other CAS/CCS staff may be reached by calling the school offices. In the event of an emergency, a CAS/CCS/BACBC staff member is always available on a 24-hour

basis. We greatly appreciate the generosity of our host families and strive to provide each host family with all of the support and understanding that they might need to ensure an enriching cross-cultural exchange.

Will we receive information about the hosting experience?

International Student Services personnel will visit your home to explain the host experience and to answer any questions that you may have. Before your student arrives, you will have a meeting either as a group with other host families or individually with an ISS staff member. You will be provided with orientation materials that will provide more details about the intercultural experiences of hosting. When your application has been approved and placement is confirmed, you will receive a host family packet from ISS.

How will our family benefit from hosting an international exchange student?

Hosting an exchange student is a rewarding experience for your whole family. You'll learn about another culture and language — without leaving home. You'll start a life-long relationship with your new "son" or "daughter," and when your student returns home you'll have a special friend in another country. Members of your family will feel closer to each other through sharing your daily lives with an exchange student. If you have children, they'll gain a broader perspective on the world, learning more about geography, communication and international cultures. If your children are young, they'll probably love having a big brother or sister from another country.

What are our responsibilities as host parents?

Most host families will be asked to become legal guardians for the exchange students (some students have a local relative act as their legal guardians). Host families are to care for the students as they would their own children. This means that the families are expected to provide a clean living environment, good nourishment, and lots of love and support. The students will provide their own spending money for expenses incurred outside of the home; CCS provides emergency medical and accident insurance coverage for each student through the school. Host families must provide a willingness to open their home and heart to an exchange student; a separate bed and a quiet place to study; daily meals with the family; some local transportation; and open communication, encouragement and sound advice.

What is expected of exchange students?

Students are expected to be a responsible and caring member of the family; to attend school regularly and show consistent effort; to share his/her culture and customs with hosts and their community; to participate fully in family and school life; and to have open communication and a commitment to the program.

What will our exchange student expect?

The exchange students who participate in the ISS Host Family Program expect to be treated as a member of your family. They have made the decision to leave behind their own family and friends for a period of time, to have the experience of living with an American family, and to attend an American high school. The international students are as diverse as the American families who host them. Some are outgoing and gregarious; others are quiet and shy. Like most teenagers around the world, they are curious and inquisitive. They have come to the US to discover what the American way of life is all about. They have also come as ambassadors from their countries to share their way of life with you. Your exchange student will expect you to communicate with them about your values, and will also expect you to listen when they tell you about the way of life in their country.

Who pays for our exchange student's expenses during the program?

All exchange students have their own spending money and are asked to bring or receive from home approximately \$150-200 per month to cover personal expenses such as school supplies, clothing, toiletries, snacks outside of the home, entertainment, etc. Host families are expected to provide room and board and up to 3 meals a day for the student. The expenses of the host families will differ, depending on the lifestyle of each individual family. A monthly stipend will be paid to the host family to help cover the costs of room and board for the student.

Are there any legal issues or obligations when housing an international student?

Your legal responsibilities are similar to those times when your child might bring a friend home to stay for the night. That friend temporarily becomes part of your family, and you stand in the role of that child's parent. In the school context, that means that you will be responsible for making sure the student attends school, does their homework, and is doing well in their studies. You are a bridge between the school and the child's parents, and you will provide updates to the parents and sometimes make decisions on their behalf since it is not likely they will be able to attend parent conferences or read school notices.

Is the host family the legal sponsor for the student?

No. The school is the legal sponsor for the student. The host family does, however, have permission to obtain medical treatment from a licensed physician for the student when necessary. A medical release signed by the natural parents is included in the student's application.

Will my guest student be able to communicate with me in English if I am not familiar with his or her native language?

Foreign-born students have different language abilities. Some students come to school with a very good command of the English language, while others are still shy about using their English. Every student is, at the very least, fluent enough to make his or her way about school on a daily basis. If you are anxious about hosting a student with very limited ability to speak English, it is best to say so on your application form. However, we find that most students and families find a way to communicate. A friendly smile and a caring gesture go a long way in making students feel welcome and relaxed. Also, students are encouraged to speak as much English as possible when in a host family home.

Note: If by chance, host families can speak the student's native language, it is a requirement of our ISS Host Family Program that English be used in the home.

Will our student abide by the rules of our home?

Your student is expected to behave as a member of your family and follow all of the rules and expectations of your household. Since every family has its own set of house rules and policies, it is important for the family to take time in the beginning to explain to their student everything that is needed to know about household, including rules, chores, daily schedules, curfews, etc. International Student Services will provide you with information, which will be helpful to you in the initial stages of your hosting experience. In addition, the ISS Host Family handbook contains information about communicating rules and regulations to your exchange student. You should be honest and open about your household rules. Remember, your student is not merely a guest, but a new member of your family!

How are hosts and students matched?

ISS will try to match as closely as possible the interests and preferences submitted by hosts and students. The majority of the students are matched with hosts by early August, just prior to the beginning of the academic year.

Is there anything else I should know about hosting a student with limited language ability?

Yes, trying to speak in a language other than your native language for extended periods of time can be exhausting, so be patient with your student and don't be offended if he or she does not try to keep up a constant conversation. Also, some students are embarrassed by their limited ability, so letting them see that you are pleased with their efforts is a wonderful way to encourage your student to use this time with you to improve their English.

Is it important for me to know anything in particular about my guest student's culture?

Of course, it is always nice to understand a bit about a person's background, but it is not necessary. If you would like more information about your student's culture, the Internet, local libraries, and bookstores are great resources.

May our exchange student share a bedroom with one of our children?

Many host families do not have enough bedrooms in their home to accommodate an exchange student with a private bedroom. We require only that your student be given his or her own bed, space in the closet or the dresser, and a desk or table at which to study. Consideration should be given to the fact that your student will be attending high school and will be required to study and do homework. If the exchange student will be sharing a bedroom with one of your children, the difference in their ages must not be greater than 2 or 3 years and must be of the same sex.

Will our student have insurance coverage?

Your exchange student is covered with medical/accident insurance and will receive an insurance card. Emergency dental treatment is covered for relief of pain or when damage to the teeth is caused by an accident.

Would it be acceptable to invite our student to our place of worship?

Your exchange student should be invited to attend your place of worship. If your exchange student is of a different religion, but is interested in attending your church to learn more about it, they should be welcomed. However, attendance of religious services should not be forced upon the student. Arrangements should be made to allow the exchange student to attend the church of their choice if so desired.

May we allow our student to travel on his or her own?

Your exchange student is not permitted to travel outside the local area by themselves or with peers. Overnight travel with the host family, another family or responsible adult is permitted if the host family and ISS give prior consent. Overnight travel is also permitted with an approved group (e.g. school, church, etc). The host family and ISS must be informed of all such trips and have a telephone number and name of a responsible adult, in order to reach the student in an emergency.

What is the next step?

If you would like more information about the program, please contact International Student Services at: studentservices@casalameda.org.

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