

GLOBAL STUDY CONNECTIONS

HOST PARENT HANDBOOK

A guide to everything you need to know about becoming a host parent



GSC is an American based educational consulting group who works with international families and its international partners in the placement and support of students during their study abroad experience.

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YOUR LOCAL GSC COORDINATOR

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Home Telephone _____
Cell Number _____
Email Address _____

YOUR STUDENT

Name _____
Email Address _____
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HOST PARENT

Name _____
Address _____

E-mail Address _____
Phone _____

Important Information

the host family



Each family has their own unique structure, character, and routine. Bringing an international student into your family means adding an entirely new element into your daily life. Unless you have hosted before, your family will be faced with some brand new experience. Learning how to relate and communicate with each other will take some time, but you will find your comfort zone.

The two major expectations are that your family is willing to:

- Open up your home and share your lives with a young person from another culture
- Provide your international student with support and love

Sharing your lives and welcoming a visitor into your home does require you to be open and honest. You and your family need to share your views and expectations with the new family member. This is often a process and not a one-time event. Students are often hesitant and even scared as they enter a new living environment. Patience, love and open communication will all help in making this an experience you will never forget and always cherish.

As a Host Family, you agreed to the following responsibilities as part of your commitment to host:

- 1. Provide the student with meals. GSC expects that our Host Families will provide meals for their international student as they would for their own child. This means 3 meals a day including weekends. You may prepare a lunch for the student to take to school.**
- 2. Host Families must provide the student with a bed of his or her own. Students may share a bedroom with a host brother or sister, providing that the host sibling is of the same sex and within 4 years in age.**
- 3. Since this is an academic program, GSC requires that a Host Family provides the student with a quiet place to study. This can be in any room in the house where studying and homework may be completed.**
- 4. GSC expects that our Host Families will treat their international student as a member of the family and NOT as a guest. Your student should be subject to the same house rules, chores, discipline, praise and affection as are other family members. By treating your international student as an equal they will become a part of your family.**
- 5. Adhere to GSC's policies and guidelines, and keep in touch with GSC staff member in your area of GSC staff member assigned to you. Provide monthly written reports to GSC staff member.**
- 6. Provide your student with rides to school, as well as any necessary tests, medical appointments or rides to and from the airport (just as you would your own child).**

your student

More and more international students are choosing to study in America. Your student is a part of this trend. These students want to attend the best American university and the first step is often attending a private American day or boarding school as a means of improving their English skills and accessing honors and AP courses. These students are enrolled in their school because of their commitment and desire to:

- Enroll in a US high school for a period of 1 to 4 years.
- Live with a US family and learn about day-to-day US life



When deciding to study in America, students understand that they may be placed with a Host Family anywhere in the continental United States. While many of these students are from large cities, Host Families generally live in suburban or rural settings. This new lifestyle will be a big change for them.

Like most teenagers, international students are going through a number of changes. Add to this the fact that s/he has been separated from his/her support network of natural family, close friends, and community. GSC international students are facing a big challenge, and should be commended for their courage. Living in a foreign country and speaking a different language will be full-time work for your student.

Being an international student comes with a number of new rules and responsibilities. As the “outsider”, students need to make an extra effort to fit in and fully experience their new life. Students are required to follow the regulations of the Host Family, GSC, and the State Department.



pre-arrival

The Host Family Perspective

Families decide to host an international student at different times during the year. While many Host Families find themselves with months to think about their hosting experience, some of you sign on shortly before your student's arrival. Either way, there are several steps that you can take to learn as much as possible about your student's homeland to prepare for your hosting experience.

- Find your student's country and town on a map
- Look up his/her country in the encyclopedia or on the Internet, or do some light research at your local library
- Stay on top of world news stories
- Speak to people who have traveled to that country or have relatives there
- Dine at a restaurant that serves food from your student's nation
- Rent a movie that takes place in your student's country
- Watch for educational programming on television

Email your student immediately to:

- Let him/her know how much you are looking forward to his/her arrival
- Send information about your town and community, and send a local newspaper
- Include photographs or postcards of nearby sights
- Provide information about high school courses
- Describe the local weather and give ideas on what to pack

Familiarize yourself with his/her language:

- Learn the correct pronunciation of your student's name
- Purchase a bi-lingual dictionary
- Learn a few words in your student's language (such as: hello, thank you and good night).



Prepare a "Welcome Kit" to give your student upon arrival:

- Draw a map of the house
- Create a welcome letter from the whole family
- Provide a scrap book for memories of the orientation and his/her arrival in the United States
- Prepare a small address book with addresses, phone numbers and emergency numbers
- Consider having a set of house keys made

Become informed about the hosting experience:

- Invite a current international student into your home and ask questions
- Get in touch with a family who has hosted before
- Stay in touch with your student's guardian or local coordinator and be sure to ask any questions that arise

Your student's space:

- Before s/he arrives, take the time to make up his/her bed
- Clear out some drawers and make room in the closets
- Consider framing a photograph of the student and his/her natural family (from the student's application) and add to your own display of family photo-graphs

arrival day



This is the day both you and your student have been waiting for - his/her arrival to your community. You are both very excited and perhaps a little scared. Your student may be feeling overwhelmed, so we have put together some suggestions on how to handle your first day together, and information on what to expect.

GOING TO THE AIRPORT

Host families are responsible for meeting their student at the airport upon arrival unless otherwise arranged with the GSC office. Host Families, particularly those in rural areas, may be asked to drive up to two hours to pick up their student, and both GSC and the student greatly appreciate this effort. GSC students arrive at the nearest major airport to

the Host Family. Although students try to purchase tickets to the closest possible airport, tickets to small commuter airports may significantly increase the cost of the airfare as well as create very long layovers for students who are traveling alone. While you will know your student's arrival date well in advance, the flight details themselves may not be available until just several days prior to your student's arrival. GSC will provide Host Families with flight details as soon as they are received from the overseas cooperators. Unfortunately this can be last minute and we apologize in advance for any inconvenience it may cause. It is always a good idea to call the airline to confirm an on-time flight arrival before you head off to the airport.

THAT FIRST CONTACT

Many Host Families prepare a large sign and/or bring balloons or flowers to welcome their student. This will help the student to identify you. Be sure to bring your camera along so that you can look back on this special day. This moment may be one of excitement, nervousness, awkwardness, happiness, and/or relief. Your student may greet you with a big hug and kiss or a handshake and nervous "hello". Be sure to smile and let them know how happy you are that they have finally arrived. Take your cues from your student and do whatever feels right.



A QUIET MOMENT

There is generally much anticipation as to how the first meeting will go. It is a good idea to find a quiet place to sit down at the airport and talk for a few minutes. Ask your student how the flight was and if they are hungry. Make sure the student has all his/her luggage



and if not help them fill out any baggage claim forms that need to be fill out. Remember that your student may be keyed up with excitement or nervousness, or may be very tired from his/her journey and still suffering from jet lag. Try not to fit everything in at once - you will have plenty of time later to catch up. Although your student has studied English for years, this is probably his/her first time speaking nonstop in a second language. Speak slowly and clearly (not loudly) and expect to repeat much of what you say again over the first few weeks.

REACHING HOME

Briefly show your student around the house and point out only the routines that s/he needs to know right away (for example: how the shower works, use of the bathroom, location of the light switches, and where to put his/her belongings). Allow your student plenty of time to unpack, take a nap, and just unwind. S/he should call his/her natural

family to let them know that s/he has arrived safely. Remember that some students may have been traveling 18-26 hours and crossed many time zones; therefore, they will need 3-7 days to adjust their “body clocks”, which means they will sleep at odd hours initially.

at the beginning

Many Host Families make the mistake of planning too much too soon. Your focus should be to do as much as you can to help your student feel like a family member, not a guest. Be flexible. Your student may tire quickly, or may be filled with energy. Make plans according to what you think your student is up for. Packing the first week with activities and parties may give the student an unrealistic expectation of what life in the U.S. will be like for them. This does not mean that you should not celebrate his/her arrival, but try to use moderation in your planning and keep your student informed as to what is happening.

Some suggested topics to cover regarding family rules:

1. Pets - feeding them and walking them	11. Where and when a student can entertain friends
2. Laundry - where dirty laundry is kept, how laundry is done	12. What a closed door means
3. Bathroom etiquette	13. Mealtimes - when and what help is expected
4. Keeping doors locked or unlocked	14. Chores - who does what
5. How your family expresses appreciation and thanks	15. Taking out the garbage and how to recycle
6. How your family expresses disagreement	16. Bedtime and curfew
7. What is “up for grabs” to eat	17. Television viewing rules
8. what it means in your family to be on time	18. Dating
9. Things that are off-limits	19. Computer/internet use
10. What is shared by all	20. Telephone rules

Here are some additional tips for the beginning days:

- Make sure that your student has enough space to unpack. Try to get a sense of things that you can do to make him/her more comfortable.
- Discuss with your student where s/he plans to keep important documents, such as passports, airline tickets and insurance information. These should be stored in a safe place but also in a location that is easily accessible in case of an emergency.
- Give the student a complete tour of the house, pointing out where things are kept such as linens, pantry items, and reading materials.
- During the first day or two you may want to discuss what everyone wants to be called. Will you be “Mom and Dad” or “Mr. and Mrs.”? Does your student have a nickname? Agree upon what is comfortable for everyone, bearing in mind that you can always make changes later.

- Establish your expectations and rules soon after your student arrives. They may need occasional reminders since the first couple days can be overwhelming.
- Explain where coats are hung, where to throw out trash and what to do with food waste. Point out the location of light switches, lamps and laundry facilities.
- Show how to operate the television, stereo, garage door and how to lock the doors.
- Take a walking tour of the neighborhood and drive him/her around the town.
- Orient your student to the location of your house in relation to the downtown, shopping areas, grocery store and high school.
- Show them where you work, bring them to the clubs, church or synagogue, or YMCA that you belong to.

FAMILY RULES

While it is expected that students must follow all Host Family rules, it is your responsibility to communicate clearly what these rules include. Prior to the student's arrival, it is a good idea to take the time to sit down with family members and prepare a list of rules, but be flexible early on since language may prevent your student from understand all the rules initially. Putting the rules in writing will help the student, allowing him/her to review them as questions arise. Some house rules are unspoken or rarely talked about, but your international student should not be expected to know about these, so be sure to include them with the rest of the rules.



It is important to keep lines of communication open at all times. Don't get discouraged if things do not get off to a smooth start, everything can be worked out through discussion. Small aggravations that get ignored can bloom into a bigger problem later. "Nip it in the bud!" Speak honestly with your student (and encourage him/her to do the same) about what concerns you and arrange a time to discuss and evaluate how things are going along the way.

ESTABLISH THE RULES, EXPECTATIONS AND SCHEDULE WITHIN THE FIRST DAY or TWO - Do not treat your student as a guest initially and then change the rules later. This gives him or her mixed messages about YOUR EXPECTATIONS

SETTLING IN

The first few days after your student arrives, s/he will probably feel like, and be treated as, a guest. Over time, your international student will begin to become a member of your family. However, it is not like bringing an infant home from the hospital, where you will teach everything from the beginning. Your host son/daughter is a teenager who has been used to the way things are done at his/her own home and now needs to be taught what it is like in your family. In addition, each student adapts to his/her new life at his/her own speed; some students fit in right away, while others take a bit longer.



ROUTINES

So much of your family's day-to-day life is taken for granted. Be sure to take the time to explain to your student the family routine to help him/her fit in. Talk about when everyone wakes up, who is in charge of breakfast, making beds and changing sheets, carpools, etc. You can make things much easier for your student if you tell him/her about your routines from the start.

MEALS

It is important that both breakfast and dinner be prepared for the student. While it is not expected for Host Families to make special meals for their international students, it is important to find out if they have any allergies or aversions. Most teenagers are willing to try new foods, but do not be surprised if your student does not like the same foods as you. The good news is that many foods are now universal, with pizza and hamburgers found in countries around the world. Also feel free to ask a student to cook from their own country. They will need your assistance and supervision, but this is a great way to allow the student to introduce you to their culture. Also be aware that there are difference in dining times and styles. The typical US dinner time is 6:00pm (viewed by many cultures as early) and is often eaten in a hurry on the way to a ball game or PTA meeting. Asians, for example, tend to have a more formal evening meal that begins between 7:00 to 8:00pm. Your student will adapt to your ways, but it may take some adjustment. School lunches are a topic that should be discussed. Your student should have "brown bag"



lunch prepared by you. If the student chooses to buy their lunch at school they should inform you the night before. If you are receiving a stipend for hosting the student contributing a few dollars (\$4-5) toward their purchasing a lunch would be reasonable.

** One of the most common complaints from students is that there is not enough food in the house, please keep your fridge and cabinets stocked with enough food for them.

SIBLINGS

Both the international students and their host brothers or sisters greatly look forward to having a special relationship with one another. However, like all friendships, it may need some time to grow. This relationship is not always a guaranteed success: your own children may develop some feelings of jealousy at the extra attention your student is receiving, the international student may out-shine the host sibling in his/her similar sport, or each is not what the other expected. If trouble arises, it is very important that host parents show equal consideration for both sides of the argument. Help your child imagine how s/he would be in a similar situation and point out that they do not need to be best friends, but do need to respect each other as family members.



LANGUAGE

Although all GSC students have studied English for a number of years, generally they have had limited opportunities for conversational practice. A newly arrived student will find listening and communicating continuously in English to be exhausting. In addition, your international student's language skills will be at his/her worst during the first few weeks, due to stress and the pressure to communicate only in a foreign language. S/he may seem quiet or disinterested at times, but this may be more a

case of fatigue or frustration that comes with not being able to express ideas and feelings as easily as in his/her native language. Try to include activities where speaking is not necessary, such as playing sports, listening to music, or working on an art project.

Always encourage your student to express him/herself so that s/he gains confidence and practice. Avoid speaking on your student's behalf, but do correct pronunciation. Remember to speak clearly and slowly (not loudly) and expect to repeat yourself. When in doubt if your student understood something that was said, ask him/her to repeat it, and ask questions that cannot be answered with just a "yes" or "no".

TRANSPORTATION

Host Families are expected to help the student with transportation to and from school. This means that the student needs to be driven every day, unless the school itself provides a bus that will take the student to school and bring them home. Carpooling is permitted. Also show the student the various modes of transportation that are available - whether it is walking, riding a bike, taking a bus, or becoming part of a carpool. Explain transportation arrangement in detail, and if possible, escort your student to the bus stop or walk with them the first few days. Make sure they carry on them your name, address and phone number in the case of an emergency. Host families are responsible for ensuring students are able to get to and from school in a timely and safe manner. Host families are also responsible for making sure that their student gets to any necessary appointments (tests or medical appointments). Host parents will also need to make sure that they can pick up their student from the airport and also deliver them to the airport at the end of the school year.

RELIGION

Here in the United States, religion can play a very important role in the spiritual and social life of many Host Families. GSC students are initially asked to attend services with their Host Families in order to get the experience, but are by no means required to participate on a regular basis if they do not want to. It is important to let your student know that the church/synagogue often fills a social and spiritual role and that s/he may want to try out the youth group to make friends and to gain a feeling of belonging to the community. If your student wishes to attend services of a different faith, try to help him/her connect with a member of that religious organization who will help with introductions and/or transportation.



MONEY

Students are expected to have access to a minimum of \$150 to \$200 per month to cover personal expenses. Since students are bringing their own spending money, Host Families are not expected to bear any financial burden beyond food, housing, and transportation. While some students arrive with all of their spending money, many will receive periodic allowances from home. Other students will arrive with a credit card or ATM card that enables them to

withdraw funds electronically from an overseas account. Find out from your student how they are set up financially so that you can provide help in setting up a bank account. Talk together with the bank to establish an account that can enable funds to be easily transferred from overseas. Remember that the students are teenagers who probably have minimal (if any) experience managing money and also may have trouble understanding the value of a new currency. Have a clear discussion on what you expect the students to be responsible for regarding family trips and evenings out. Try not to pay too much at the beginning of the year that you don't intend to continue paying for throughout the student's stay. Many families follow a guideline of paying the same expenses for their international student as they would their own son or daughter. Each Host Family needs to establish what will work best for them.

CELL PHONES

Many students choose to use phone cards for all long distance and international calls or purchase a trac phone or regular cell phone, still others use Skype. This way they will not have to get involved with paying their host family for telephone bills. If a student wants to purchase a cell phone you should help in the process, but not sign any contracts for the student.

CHORES

Your international student should assume the same household responsibilities as you would expect of your own son or daughter. Routine chores such as making the bed, doing laundry, taking out the garbage and recycling, meal preparation, and washing the dishes are part of a student's everyday life. Although some of the students come from parts of the world where it is typical to have household help, they have all been told that in the United States everyone in the family pitches in with the chores. Host Families should assign the same amount of household responsibilities to the international student as they would to their own son or daughter.

culture shock



Traveling to a foreign culture as a tourist is a completely different experience than living in a foreign culture for an extended period of time. A short term trip to another part of the USA, Europe, Asia, South America, or Africa is filled with excitement and fascinating experiences - and then

you return home. The start of most international experiences begins the same, as if it were a short holiday. At first everything is a new adventure. Soon to follow is a period of exhaustion from facing a new country with a different language, culture, community, family, school, friends, diet, climate, etc. Coping with all of the changes requires a high level of concentration in order to function each day. It is very common for international students to experience what is known as “culture shock” - feelings of frustration and anxiety due to unfamiliar surroundings and customs.

Culture shock can affect each student in a different way. Occasional sadness, a desire to speak with people from home, and frustrations with language barriers are fairly common responses. More severe cases of culture shock may lead to a student withdrawing, sleeping excessively, losing his/her appetite or overeating, or becoming extremely depressed or negative. Showing extra support and sympathy during this time can help the student a great deal. Encourage them to remember that this is a typical reaction and that they will get through it. Help your student find ways to stay busy and plan future activities and trips. Your Local Coordinator can be a resource for you and your student at this time.

throughout the year



During your hosting adventure, you will learn and experience many new things. As with any teenager, problems may arise, and it is important to remember that cultural differences can play a factor. The GSC office is here to support you and to provide any advice needed throughout the program year. It is important to try to work through most issues as a family, but always

keep the GSC office informed of a potential problem or an ongoing issue.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES: International study abroad programs exist in part to share the different cultures found throughout the world. Whether such differences are subtle or blatantly obvious, they need to be viewed as only differences, and not as right versus wrong. Hosting a teenager from a foreign culture means not only hosting a teenager, but also hosting his/her foreign culture! Your host son or daughter is a product of his/her own natural family as well as the ways of the country where s/he grew up. If you are having a problem, or there is a misunderstanding, take a moment first to consider if the source of

the problem may be a cultural difference.

Below are some examples of cultural differences that you may experience:

- The host daughter from Asia who spends much of her time in the bedroom studying with the door closed may not be anti-social. Asian students put in long hours studying and are expected to take school work very seriously.
- The boy from Brazil who takes instructions presented by his host father more seriously than when his host mother is asking him to do something may not be disrespectful. He may be used to getting information and directions from the “man of the house”.
- The German girl who is stunned that her host siblings know very little about US politics may not be judgmental. In most parts of the world, teenagers are aware and involved in global politics and especially US policies since so much of the world is affected by decisions made by the US government.
- The Polish host son who spends much of his time “arguing” at the dinner table may not be hostile. His family and friends in Poland may value analytical discussions and heated debates.

Try to remember that your student may be viewing some of your behavior as strange or different. By asking questions and gaining a better understanding of what life at home is like for him or her, you will not only avoid potential problems, but will also learn something new about the world around you. What makes this experience so special is the differences - don't miss the opportunity to learn about your student's culture and customs. International students are proud to speak about their country and expect new friends to want to learn about their homeland.



WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

It will be surprising if you go through the entire pro-gram year with absolutely no problems. Hopefully, these issues will be on a minor scale and can be resolved quickly. Your first approach should be to speak with the student about what is going on, keeping in mind the following questions:

- What do we think the problem is?
- What is the student's understanding of the problem?
- Has there been a family discussion about the problem?
- Have we explained what the rules are?

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- Is the student able to explain what the rules are?
- Do we treat the student like we treat other teenagers?
- Have we noticed signs of jealousy among the children in our family, including the student?
- What activities do we do with our student?
- In what ways are we communicating our feelings about how we are getting along?
- What is the student doing to adjust to our family routine?
- Have we allowed our student some personal time to be alone?
- In what ways does the student participate in the family?
- In our perception, does the student spend more time alone or with the family?
- What has the student done to make friends outside of the family?
- How well is the student adjusting to new school routines?
- How much is the student trying to improve his or her English?
- How frequently have the student and natural family maintained contact?
- How has the student shared his or her own culture with us?
- Do we feel our student is exhibiting indicators of culture shock?

ASKING FOR HELP

If you are unable to solve the problem, or feel that the problem is serious, you need to turn to the GSC staff for help. By calling or emailing the GSC staff you should not feel as if you have failed. It is often difficult to clearly analyze a situation when you are deeply involved. The GSC staff is there to provide support, help clarify problems, and consider alternatives to arrive at the best solution.

Above all – have fun & enjoy this adventure in cross-cultural communication; it is the heart of the experience of GSC and will result in some of your most cherished memories.



To Learn More: Culture Websites

- All: <http://www.culturebriefings.com> complete briefings for purchase
<http://www.ipl.org/div/kidSPACE/cquest> links to many different foreign countries
- Austria: <http://www.aboutaustria.org/> general overview of Austria
http://www.austria.info/xxl/_site/us/_area/416153/home.html general information
<http://www.kidskonnnect.com/content/view/302/27/> for kids
- China: <http://www.atozkidsstuff.com/china.html> for kids
<http://www.chinatoday.com/> general information
- France: <http://www.dsokids.com/2001/dso.asp?PageID=285> easy for kids
<http://www.ipl.org/div/kidSPACE/cquest/europe/frholidays.html> for kids
<http://www.cyborlink.com/besite/france.htm> basic customs
- Germany: <http://library.thinkquest.org/26576/> excellent site
<http://www.aboutgermany.org/> general overview with customs
<http://home.freeuk.net/elloughton13/germany.htm> great for kids
- Japan <http://www.japaneselifestyle.com.au/> general overview of Japan
<http://www.japanguide.com/e/e622.html> Japanese etiquette
<http://www.ipl.org/div/kidSPACE/cquest/asia/jahol.html> for kids
- Spain: <http://www.dsokids.com/2001/dso.asp?PageID=298> for kids
<http://www.ipl.org/div/kidSPACE/cquest/europe/spholidays.html> for kids
<http://www.mapzones.com/world/europe/spain/cultureindex.php> general overview
http://www.escuelai.com/practicalguide_sp.html general
- South Korea: <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/korean.htm> Korean Language
<http://www.lifeinkorea.com/information/general.cfm> general info
<http://www.korea.net/> comprehensive overview
<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/oldworld/asia/koreanculture.html> lots of info
<http://www.pbs.org/hiddenkorea/intro.htm> general
- Turkey: <http://www.allaboutturkey.com/info.htm> general information
http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/284/country_guide/Europe/Turkey.html overview
<http://kids.yahoo.com/reference/worldfactbook/country/tuTurkey> for kids