



Host Family Handbook

Welcoming a student into your home – An Experience for a Lifetime!

Becoming a host family to a student from a different country and culture is both an enriching and challenging experience. Welcoming international students into your home helps develop friendships that will last a lifetime. By sharing your home and offering guidance to your student, your family becomes an important part of that student's life. At MSJ we foster activities that help to develop leadership skills, as well as the understanding of, and appreciation for, such concepts as volunteerism, diversity and civic responsibility. The host families in this community are critical in providing our visiting youth the opportunity to experience U.S. culture, and to receive an education, which benefits the communities to which they return.

Guidelines for a successful homestay experience

- Welcome the student into your home with care and understanding. Remember that the student may be homesick upon arrival. Show compassion and sensitivity to this condition.
- Understand and agree to accept this student as one of the family. It may be uncomfortable at first, but include them in normal family activities.

- Talk to your student regularly. Show interest in their school projects activities or hobbies.
- Spend recreational time with your student. Encourage students to make friends at school and in the neighborhood. School and community activities are an important part of your student's experience in Vermont. Provide a reasonable amount of transportation for your student to attend school activities or other community activities.
- Monitor the student's progress in school. Offer assistance and guidance to your student when possible.
- Maintain communication with MSJ staff. Try to resolve problems through proactive communication and understanding.
- Successful families also give their students time, attention, and love. These attributes make the program a memorable experience for everyone involved.

Preparing for the arrival of your student

Necessities for your student include a bed, a desk, and somewhere to store clothes and other personal items. Other useful items:

- Clock radio (although many students bring an alarm clock, ipad or laptop)
- Bulletin board (especially if families do not want items attached to the walls)
- Calendar
- Reading light
- Extra blankets (many students come from warmer climates)
- Any other small touches

Students should also have:

- Set of keys
- List of important phone numbers (police, emergency contacts, etc.)

Host families agree to:

- Explain family rules and expectations
- Be familiar with program rules
- Provide adequate bedroom space
- Equip home with smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and share easiest escape routes
- Provide three meals per day
- Provide transportation to MSJ for school and extracurricular events
- Expose students to local cultural events
- Invite and encourage participation in family events
- Provide use of common areas in the home (living room, family room, etc.)
- Allow use of telephone (with a student purchased pre-paid card for international calls) and computer wifi according to family house rules
- Encourage involvement in daily functions of family life (meal preparation, clean up, etc.)
- Provide guidance and advice for school and social questions

Host families are not responsible for:

- Student finances – students are responsible for setting up their own bank accounts, with the help of host families. Host families are not responsible for providing an allowance, monitoring spending, or lending money.
- Individual items – students are responsible for purchasing their own toiletry items, school supplies, club memberships, social events, etc. However, if the family takes their student to dinner or a social event, then the host family should cover the cost.
- Monitoring food – families are not responsible for putting the student on any kind of diet including one for personal or religious beliefs. Families are, however, responsible for providing healthy meals and snacks.

It is a good idea to start corresponding with your student once you have completed the host family profile and have received your students contact information. This helps to give the family better insight to the student's personality, his/her likes, dislikes, and expectations. In return the student's family learns more about the family their child will be living with while attending school.

In the time before a student arrives it is also a great idea to do some research on the student's home country. This helps give insight into the culture and helps with

communication, because host families can ask questions about their student's homeland, usually a comfortable topic.

It can also be useful to contact local American students in the area who are close in age to the visiting student. Let them know an international student is arriving. Ask them if they might show the student around, take them to a few social events, etc. If this fits your situation, this makes the first few weeks much easier on the student as he or she would feel more welcome to the community.

Student arrival

Once correspondence begins with the student, host families could hear from them about their flight arrival information. MSJ confirms all flights, and provides the host family with flight and arrival information. International students are asked to fly into Burlington International Airport.

Once students arrive at their home stay, excitement is high. During the first hours students may not be the least bit tired and usually want to take in as much as they possibly can. However, some students will be tired or jet-lagged after the long journey. Some will be very hungry and others will not be hungry or want to eat for a day or two. Remember, the combination of being excited and being on a different time clock can produce some different behavior. Some students adjust quickly to their new home while others take much longer.

After arriving home from the airport, show the student his/her room and around the house. Tell where things are and how they work. However, with all the excitement in those first few hours, students may not remember everything their host family has told them. Think about the student waking up the next morning in a strange house and anticipate what she/he might be wondering. Remember the more help students get with practical matters the more at ease they will feel. Don't be afraid to explain the simple things. In a new culture even the small things are new. Also remember that families have an established way of interacting and a way of daily operation. Adding a new person to this mixture is a jolt to all family members. Be clear and direct with the student and approach matters and questions with an open mind. Hesitation and confusion often occur for both family and student during the first few weeks of the program. Working out what place the student will take in the host family often leads to some awkward moments. This is normal. However, once things get worked through, everyone can concentrate on building interesting and enriching relationships. Remember to be patient with your student.

Culture shock and international students

Culture shock often happens to international students during their stay. Here are some ideas about culture shock and methods of dealing with the problem. Four phases to be aware of:

1. The Honeymoon – students are excited about their new experiences and surroundings. Students will begin to associate America with their home country. They will also look for similarities between the two, and this helps them feel more comfortable.
2. Shock – students start to feel a little disoriented. They will start to notice the differences between American living and home. At this point the student might feel the most homesick. Most students do not display strong symptoms; however, some may get sleepier or need more time alone away from the host family. Keep the lines of communication open during this time as the student may want to talk about his/her feelings.
3. Recovery – students feel more comfortable, relaxed, and secure within their surroundings.
4. Home free – students are now members of the family. Students will begin to enjoy the differences of their new life. They will also display more confidence and feel at home with their host family.

Students will go through these stages at different paces and some may not experience any culture shock. Culture shock is temporary for most students. With a little understanding and guidance from the host family, students can recover quickly.

Those first few weeks

The first several weeks of the program can be a difficult time for international students and their host families. MSJ suggests students and host families spend that time getting to know each other better. Issues families will want to address:

1. Food – in some cases when students first arrive they do not eat a lot. Imagine uprooting your life, living with a family from a different culture, and having to eat different foods. A good idea is to take them on a trip to the grocery store where they can point out some of their favorite foods.
2. Supervision – students need to understand from the beginning the rules for things including curfew, meal times, and telephone calls home. Some students find attentiveness to their whereabouts intrusive. Explain that in America parents do pay attention to these details for the students' own safety and wellbeing. Other students

find their host family liberal in their rules and can find it difficult to get used to their newfound freedom.

3. Language – students might find it difficult to talk with and understand their new families and friends. MSJ suggests families and friends speak slowly and try avoiding slang. Help your student with his/her pronunciation and with speaking in sentences. Before long, the student will sound just like any member of the family.
4. Manners – what we perceive as good manners can be completely different in another country. Silence and lack of curiosity in some areas of the world is considered rude. However, in some cultures it is a sign of respect. In some cultures, people do not say please and thank you as readily as we do in America. A student's level of modesty can be quite different from your own.
5. Transportation – most of our students come from large cities where public transportation is readily available. Some students find it difficult to rely on their host family to drive them to their various activities. They might complain about their location as a result. Explain that in many places across the country this is the reality and that the student just needs to get used to it and adjust. MSJ prohibits students from driving or obtaining a driver's permit while part of the international program.
6. School and Friends – all international students must attend school. They must also put an effort into their studies. It is a good idea to remind them of program rules and expectations. Encouraging the student to enroll in after school activities is a great way for him or her to meet new students and meet their physical education credits through sports program participation. It also helps make the stay here in America richer and more memorable.
7. Cultural Sensitivity – students come from many different countries and walks of life. Customs about cleanliness, including showers and laundry, to personal space, including shaking hands, hugging, and table manners may vary greatly from ours. Families are encouraged to discuss these and other habits with their students as early as possible.

Student travel

Host families are encouraged to take their students to travel and visit other places in America either at the expense of the host family or the student's. If the student travels with his/her host family, permission is considered by MSJ, the student's agency and natural parents before being granted. However, if the student plans to travel out of the state, without his or her host parents, the student's parents must give written permission to MSJ. MSJ asks host families to inform the staff before taking their student on a trip that is going to last more than a day. In case of an emergency, MSJ needs to know where to reach the

student or family. If the host family has travel plans, during the school year, that can not include their hosted student, the host family may inquire with MSJ for names and contacts of MSJ temporary placements.

Medical insurance

All international and diversity students come with their own medical coverage, and should have a card showing their current medical coverage through their provider. MSJ will have a copy of the student's insurance card and immunization records. The student and/or the student's family will pay for any co-pay, and for services not covered by their insurance. MSJ, and the host families, are not responsible for any medical bills incurred by the student.

Money

Students are responsible for their own financial matters. MSJ recommends families help their student set up a personal bank account if needed. Families should discuss any plans the students and their parents have for spending money.

MSJ advises host families not to lend money to their student. If hosts feel their student is not receiving enough money from home or is spending beyond their means, they should contact MSJ.

Financial reimbursement for host families

Host families receive a confidential monthly stipend from MSJ, which is outlined in the MSJ/Host Family contract. Families receive payment from MSJ, and not from the student or the student's family.

Use of telephone and computer

When students arrive, families should clarify the use of the telephone and computer, and make sure the student understands. Even though many students will come with their own cell phone, MSJ recommends families explain how to operate the telephone, answer properly and have all emergency contact numbers. MSJ encourages students without cell phones to invest in prepaid telephone calling cards. Many local stores sell the prepaid international and national telephone cards. Students benefit from the cards, because they don't owe their host family any money on their phone bills.

Departure

Students on a F-1 or J-1 visas are required to travel home, if they are here for the academic year, and will be leaving in June, sometime close to the last day of classes. MSJ will confirm travel plans and advise the host family of departure dates. If the host family wishes, and the student is returning for the next academic year, the host family can apply to host the student again.

Support for the host family

MSJ gives support to all the host families involved with the program. Host families can talk to the MSJ International and Diversity Coordinator and MSJ Staff when problems and questions arise. They also have a network of other host families for support. We recognize that without the support of these families MSJ would not continue to be successful with its international and diversity programs.