

Student Handbook

Welcome!



National Headquarters

7242 La Jolla Blvd. - La Jolla, California 92037

Telephone: (858) 455-0302 Fax: (858) 455-0335

www.afice.org

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You Have Arrived!

Welcome to the Academic Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (AFICE) Program.

Your long journey is over and you have finally arrived – welcome! By now you are most likely tired, anxious and maybe a little scared of the future. Everything you are feeling is normal and it will take a few days to get settled in. Make sure you get lots of rest upon your arrival to adjust from the jet lag.

The next few weeks will be busy and exciting. You will be adjusting to a new family, rules, and going to a new school all at the same time. So many things will be new and different, and you are feeling far from home. Your host family is here to help you and to answer any questions you have. There are also many people at AFICE whose main goal is to ensure that you have a safe and rewarding experience.

This booklet will help you try to understand America. It will tell you what to expect and give you some useful facts about living in America, getting the most from your experience here, and to learn from it, and enjoy it. Please be sure to read this booklet all the way through and keep it on hand during your stay. It is very important that you understand everything in this booklet so your stay in America will go as smoothly as possible. Be sure to ask questions to your Host Family or Community Rep if you don't understand any part of it.

All of us at AFICE hope you will have an exciting and rewarding year to look forward to!



Your Community Rep

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE

NAME: _____

TELEPHONE: () _____

EMAIL: _____

NATIONAL OFFICE

AFICE – 7242 La Jolla Blvd. La Jolla, CA 92037 * PHONE: (858) 455-0302 * FAX: (858) 455-0335

Website: www.afice.org

Email: contact@afice.org



United States Department of State

*Assistant Secretary for
Educational and Cultural Affairs*

Washington, DC 20522

Dear Student,

On behalf of the U.S. Department of State, welcome to the Secondary School Student exchange program. This program is a great opportunity for you to experience first-hand the culture and diversity that the United States has to offer. As a valued participant in this program, you are among thousands of high school students from around the world serving as your country's citizen ambassador in the United States. We want your experience to be both positive and rewarding.

As a participant in a formal exchange program you will attend an accredited public or private secondary school, while living with an American host family who has opened their home and hearts to welcome you to the United States. We know that with a positive attitude and respect for others you will achieve a close and successful relationship with your host family.

We understand that you may have concerns about leaving your family and friends at home to come to the United States and those are very normal concerns to have. I want you to know that your decision to come to the United States is important to us and that your health, safety and well-being are our highest priority. It is extremely important that you notify your sponsoring organization with any concerns or problems you might have, especially if you find yourself in a circumstance that threatens your personal health, safety or well-being or a situation that makes you uncomfortable. If your sponsor organization is not responsive to your concerns, you should not hesitate to contact the Department of State directly through the phone number or email address provided below. A Department staff person will be available to hear your concerns and assist you.

Your sponsoring organization will provide you with an identification card, which lists your host family placement address and telephone numbers, a telephone number which affords immediate contact with the program sponsor, the program sponsor's organizational representative, and the Department of State's toll free number (1-866-283-9090) and email address (jvisas@state.gov). You should keep this card with you at all times and contact us if you have any concerns about your health, safety or well-being.

Best wishes for a rewarding and fun experience. Welcome to the United States!

Sincerely,

Rick A. Ruth
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Private Sector Exchange, Acting

The Exchange Visitor Program

WELCOME BROCHURE

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
Private Sector Exchange
United States Department of State

The Department of State welcomes you to the United States. We are pleased to receive you as an exchange visitor. As an Exchange Visitor Program participant, you will acquire an experience in the United States and as an ambassador of your country you will help educate the American people about your home country and culture.

This brochure will help you understand the purpose of the Exchange Visitor Program and introduce you to some of the major requirements of the Exchange Visitor Program regulations that are most relevant to you.

THE EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE administers the Exchange Visitor Program under the provisions of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, as amended. The Act promotes mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange. The Exchange Visitor Program provides foreign nationals opportunities to participate in exchange programs in the United States with the expectation that on completion of their exchange program, they will return home to share their experiences.

Sponsors – The U.S. Department of State designates U.S. organizations such as government agencies, academic institutions, educational and cultural organizations, and corporations to administer exchange visitor programs. These organizations are known as sponsors. Sponsors screen and select exchange visitors to participate in their programs based on the regulations governing the exchange activity and stated in 22 CFR Part 62. Sponsors provide participants pre-arrival information, an orientation, and monitor their activities throughout their exchange program.

Sponsors offer or identify cross-cultural activities that will expose exchange visitors to American society, culture, and institutions. Exchange visitors are encouraged to participate in activities that provide them with an opportunity to share their language, culture, and history with Americans.

Responsible Officers – Sponsors appoint individuals as responsible officers and alternate responsible officers to advise and assist exchange visitors. These officers issue the Certificate of Eligibility (Form DS-2019), and conduct official communications with the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on your behalf. Should you have any questions about the regulations or any aspect of your exchange program, your initial and primary contact is the sponsor. Unless provided specific contact information by your sponsor you should contact the person whose name and telephone number can be found on your Form DS-2019.

Exchange Visitor – An exchange visitor is a foreign national selected by a sponsor to participate in an exchange visitor program and who is seeking to enter or has entered the United States temporarily on a J-1 visa.

Spouse and dependents - Some categories of the Exchange Visitor Program permit a spouse and/or unmarried children, under 21 years of age, to accompany an exchange visitor to the United States. These individuals are dependents of the J-1 and may apply for J-2 visas with the permission of your sponsor.

REGULATIONS - RULES

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU understand and abide by the Exchange Visitor Program regulations, U.S. laws and sponsor rules. Regular contact with your responsible officer will help you keep current of any change which may affect your J-visa status. Some requirements of the Federal regulations and where to find them are indicated below.

Register with your sponsor – Your Form DS-2019 was created in a computerized system known as the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). This System is administered by the Department of Homeland Security and is used to collect and maintain information on the current status of non-immigrants and their dependents in the sponsor's program during their stay in the United States.

When you arrive in the United States, you must contact your sponsor to ensure that your data in SEVIS is accurate and updated. Failing to maintain your status could result in serious consequences and may affect your ability to remain in or return to the United States.

Activities and Program Provisions – You entered the United States in a specific program category, and are required to engage in that category and the activity listed on your Form DS-2019. You must comply with the specific program provisions of the regulations relating to your exchange category.

Insurance – You are required to have medical insurance in effect for yourself (J-1) and any dependents (J-2) for the duration of your program. Some sponsors provide the required insurance for their participants. Other sponsors may allow you to make your own arrangements or may help to identify insurance carriers. Consult with your responsible officer before the start of your program.

(a) **Minimum Insurance Coverage** – Insurance shall cover: (1) medical benefits of at least \$50,000 per person per accident or illness; (2) repatriation of remains in the amount of \$7,500; and (3) expenses associated with medical evaluation in the amount of \$10,000.

(b) **Additional Terms** – A policy secured to fulfill the insurance requirements shall not have a deductible that exceeds \$500 per accident or illness, and must meet other standards specified in the regulations.

(c) **Maintenance of Insurance** – **Willful failure on your part to maintain the required insurance throughout your stay in the United States will result in the termination of your exchange program.**

Maintenance of Valid Program Status – You are required to have a valid and unexpired Form DS-2019. Sponsors may terminate an exchange visitor's program for violating U.S. laws, Exchange Visitor Program regulations, or the sponsor's rules governing their particular program.

Required Notifications to Sponsors – You must inform your sponsor if you change your address (residence) or telephone number, or complete or withdraw from your exchange visitor program early. Doing so assists your sponsor in complying with their notification and reporting requirements to the U.S. Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security. Failure to keep your sponsor informed could result in the termination of your program status.

Current Regulations – The Exchange Visitor Program regulations are located in the Code of Federal Regulations, (22 CFR, Part 62). The regulations are generally available for review at the offices of your sponsor, universities, law schools, or large public libraries. They are also available on the Internet at:

<http://exchanges.state.gov/education/jexchanges>

For Further Information – Additional requirements that may apply to you are set forth in the Exchange Visitor Program Regulations. Review a copy of the current regulations and consult with your responsible officer.

Contacting the Department of State – The Exchange Visitor Program is administered under the oversight of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Private Sector Exchange, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). The Office of Designation and the Office of Exchange Coordination and Compliance are located at:

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
Department of State
State Annex SA-5, Fifth Floor
Washington, DC 20522-0505

The office of Designation is organized under two divisions. The Academic and Government Programs Division, and the Private Sector Program Division. Contact information and the exchange categories for the divisions are identified below:

Academic and Government Programs Division (ECA/EC/AG)

Categories of exchange: Government Visitor, International Visitor, Professor, Research Scholar, Short-Term Scholar, Specialist, Student (College and University)

Telephone: 202 632-9310 Fax: 202 632-2701

Private Sector Program Division (ECA/EC/PS)

Categories of exchange: Alien Physician, Au Pair, Camp Counselor, Intern, Secondary Student, Summer Work Travel, Teacher, Trainee

Telephone: 202-632-2805 Fax: 202-632-2701

The Office of Exchange Coordination and Compliance is responsible for monitoring designated sponsors for regulatory compliance. Inquiries regarding sponsors and the Program can be emailed to Compliance by using JVisas@state.gov.

Your Host Family

Your Host Family is providing you with a safe place to stay, nourishing food, and supervision. You must treat your host family with respect at all times. AFICE expects that you will be a responsible and considerate member of the family. It is customary in America to say "please" and "thank you" for almost everything. If you ask for something, make sure you use the word "please" before your request. If someone does something for you, no matter how minor, you should always respond with "thank you".

You should sit down with your Host Family and talk about the family routines, rules, and other everyday things that will happen while you are here. Things like when to do your laundry, how much time to spend in the shower, use of the computer and internet, curfew and bedtimes. You will not be a guest in their home, but a member of their family. It is your responsibility to adapt to your family....it is *not* the family's responsibility to adapt to you! Your Host Family needs to know how you feel about things – if something bothers you, it is important that they know what it is that you don't like or understand. Silence or not telling them the truth will hurt everyone.

In the United States, all members of the family share the duties and jobs around the house. From a young age, children learn to take care of cleaning their own rooms and help with little jobs like emptying waste baskets and washing dishes. Teenagers usually have chores such as mowing the lawn, washing the car, vacuuming or laundry. It is not typical for American families to have outside help performing these duties. When you live with your family, you too will be expected to perform your share of the work. Ask your Host Family what household chores they would like you to do. If you are not sure how to do a chore that is asked of you, ask someone to show you how.

Belonging to a family means participating in family activities. Your effort to participate in these activities will be appreciated by your Host Family, and the experiences will be part of your new life – this is what the exchange program is all about!

The American families that welcome students into their home are not necessarily wealthy, but are families that want to share their life with you and in turn learn about your life and your country. Maybe your host family seems to have less than your family has at home, or you feel that they are making you do more than you would if you were at home – the important thing is not to compare your life in America to your life back home. There are different ways of living and this is your opportunity to do things differently for a time. Your attitude can make a big difference in the success or failure of your exchange experience.

Your Host Parents are there to be just that – parents. Talk with them, and share the good times and the bad. Being an exchange student might be harder than you thought, but it is not a sign of weakness to ask for guidance or support from your Host Parents. They want to be involved with your life, and they want to help.

Meals / Food / Eating

Your Host Family is expected to provide you with 3 meals a day of nutritious food. The only exception would be your lunches during the school week. If you chose to purchase your lunch at school, it is your responsibility to pay for the costs. School lunches are an extra expense that your host family is not expected to pay for. Your Host Family is not required to provide you with junk food, sweets, or sodas. We are not saying you cannot eat or drink this type of food, but if this is your choice then you are required to purchase it with your own money, and your host family can provide you with a space to store it. At no time should you be storing food in your bedroom.

American children are very independent and know how to feed themselves. It is reasonable for your Host Family to expect you to make your own breakfast – a bowl of cereal, toast, bagel, etc. Most families do not sit down to a cooked breakfast every day.

It is also reasonable for you to make your own sandwich for lunch, and to prepare your own after school snack. An after school, or afternoon snack is typically a piece of fruit or a bag of chips, *not 2 sandwiches and a whole pizza!*

Most evening meals (dinner) will be prepared by your Host parents, however, your chores should include some assistance at mealtime, either by helping while the meal is being prepared, and/or cleanup of the meal and dinner dishes when finished. There will be occasions where your Host parents will not be home to prepare dinner, and you will be required to make your own meal. Remember, during your family meal it is polite have second helpings if your host family offers it, and to make sure all family members share a portion of the meal. It is rude to take as much as you want before the other family members have eaten. Additionally, the American culture requires that you eat what is put in front of you. Unless you disclosed on your application that you had a specific food issue (such as an allergy or being a vegetarian), it is rude and unacceptable for you to refuse to eat the food simply because you don't like it, or decided to become a vegetarian once you arrived. You must plan on eating on the family's schedule, not yours. Sitting at the table and complaining the food is cold is your fault for not coming to the table when called – it is not your Host family's fault. This also means that you don't come home from school and have a meal sized snack, then not eat dinner with your family, then return to the kitchen in the evening to prepare additional food for yourself. This is unacceptable in most homes.

You may not see fresh items in the refrigerator and assume that "there is no food". Be sure to ask your Host Family where the freezer and cupboards are for the readymade meals and snacks that Americans traditionally have and learn how to use the microwave. In some areas of the U.S., fresh fruits and vegetables are less likely to be found in the home due to the lack of availability to get them in the winter months. Most families only go to the store every 1 or 2 weeks, and some only once a month to purchase the bulk of their food, with short trips during the week for small items such as milk or bread to carry them through till the next shopping trip.

Ask your Host Parents if you can accompany them when they go to the grocery store, so you can look for items you may want to purchase for yourself that your host family would not usually buy.

School

The High School you will attend has given permission for your enrollment in their school. Without the school's permission, AFICE could not have arranged for you to come to the U.S. It is also considered a privilege when International Students are allowed to attend a public High School at taxpayer's expense. AFICE expects you to respect both your teachers and students at all times. Any negative statements you make regarding your school experience will be reported to our office and may result in disciplinary action.

AFICE requires that you take AMERICAN HISTORY/AMERICAN GOVERNMENT and ENGLISH classes as part of your courses. You may also request classes of interest if the space is available, but you may NOT demand a class because of a requirement in your home country. You may also not demand an Honors Level class. You are required to take courses that match those in your peer group (meaning you will take the courses that other American students would typically take). These courses will depend on your age and the policies of the High School that you are attending. Your school counselor can help you determine what grade and classes you will be enrolled in.

Your school is not required to give you a diploma, or attend graduation ceremonies, and AFICE does not guarantee this to any of their students. It is up to each individual school and their policies. If your school allows you to receive a diploma, then consider it a PRIVILEGE.

AFICE encourages students to participate in school related activities, particularly team sports. Being a member of a sports team is the quickest and easiest way for you to make new friends. You should not expect to play on a varsity team, even if you are quite talented. Participating in sports is a way to make new friends, not a way to demonstrate how good an athlete you are. If you are not into sports, every high school has unique clubs and activities, such as photography clubs, ski clubs, working on the school newspaper, or designing the school yearbook. Take the time to discover these opportunities and find out what is right for you. You are free to become involved with as many extra activities as you like, as long as they don't interfere with your academic school work. Go to dances and other special events also, this way American students will know you are interested in learning about their way of life and they will include you. Ask your school counselor for a student handbook that lists all the available activities, sports and clubs. The counselor can also help you chose some. Making new friends might be the most difficult challenge you face as an exchange student. You will need to make an effort and be patient. If you only do activities with other foreign exchange students, your experience will not be as enriching and your English will not improve

You must attend school every day unless you are ill. You must maintain a minimum grade 'C' in ALL classes at ALL times. You must complete all assignments, turn in all homework, take all quizzes and tests, and receive no special treatment. Failure to do any of the above will result in disciplinary action and may be grounds for you to be sent home immediately.

Cell Phone / Computer Use

If you have arrived in the U.S. with your own cell phone, then there should already be arrangements in place for your monthly bill to be paid by your natural parents. At no time should your cell phone bill be addressed to your host family home or any cell phone bill sent to your host family address. All billing should be paid via the online payment center through your cell phone carrier, and should be paid directly by your natural parents.

If you have arrived in the U.S. and wish to have a cell phone, it is up to you to purchase one at your own expense. Under **NO** circumstances are you to ever ask your host parents to purchase a cell phone for you, and under **NO** circumstances are you to be put on your host parents cell phone plan **FOR ANY REASON!** If you wish to purchase a cell phone, you must also purchase a PRE-PAID calling card. This will allow you to add calling minutes monthly, at your own expense. The host family is not allowed to purchase a calling card for you, or pay for any expense related to your cell phone.

You must follow your host family rules in regards to cell phone time, which includes phone calls, texting, and data use. In order for you to bond with your host family you need to keep contact with family and friends back home to a maximum of once every two weeks. Constant communication with family members or friends from back home, be it calling or texting can be grounds for you to be expelled from the AFICE program.

If you do not need or want a cell phone, you need to discuss with your host family the rules regarding the use of the telephone in their home. Remember, the telephone is for everyone to use, so you must keep your telephone calls short, and speak in English. If you need to make long distance/international calls, you will need to purchase a pre-paid phone card in order to make these calls. You must make arrangements with your host family beforehand. If you need to call your parents back home for any reason, and do not have a pre-paid calling card, you must call them COLLECT. At no time should you owe your host parents any money for any telephone calls that you have made. If for any reason you owe money to your host parents for phone calls made on their phone, you must pay them back **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!**

If you have arrived in the U.S. with your laptop computer, you must abide by your host parents rules for time allowed on the computer/internet. If your host parents prefer you use your computer in the family area of the home, and not your bedroom, then you must abide by these rules also. Constant use of your computer for things other than school work can result in you spending too little time interacting with your host family, getting to know them and their culture, and letting the host family do the same in return. If you are going to be using the host family computer, you must also abide by their house rules in regards to time limits. You must also respect the usage of the family computer and internet carrier and at no time download any illegal or inappropriate material. The laws in the U.S. are very strict regarding downloading or sharing data illegally, and doing so can cause you and your host family to be fined, possibly arrested, or have your internet connection disconnected. Doing so at any time would be grounds for you to return home immediately.

Handling Expenses

Now that you have arrived, you might have some questions on what your expenses will be while you are here.

It is a requirement of the State Department that you have access to at least \$200 U.S. dollars each month that you are on the program. This money should be sent to you from your natural parents. Anything less than this amount is against the State Department regulations and will be reported. It should have been pre-arranged that your parents have given you either a credit card or an ATM debit card that you can easily use when you need to purchase personal items, or have cash on hand. If your parents have given you cash, it is your responsibility to keep it in a safe place so it will not be lost or stolen. AFICE is not responsible for any money that is lost. Most banks in the U.S. require you to have a Social Security number in order for you to open a bank account. Since that is not possible for you, and you still would feel more secure to have your money in a bank, you will need to ask your host family if there are any neighborhood banks that will let you open an account without a Social Security number. At no time are you to ask your host parents to open an account for you. It is against the rules to have your host parents' name on any bank account that holds your money. At no time should your host parents be able to access your money. If you are able to open a bank account in your name only, then you might be able to transfer money from your home country directly to your bank in the U.S. by means of a wire transfer. Your natural parents can also send an International Money Order via Air Mail directly to you.

As you can see, it is much easier to set up a credit card or ATM debit card from back home to have access to your money.

Your personal expenses while on the program will include: Clothing, entertainment such as movies or shows, gifts, postage/stamps (for mailing things back home), sporting events, toiletries (such as shampoo, toothpaste, etc.) eating out at restaurants (even if your host parents take you, you are still required to pay for your share), uniforms for school, school books, school clubs, lunches you purchase at school, bus fares, and long distance phone calls made from your host family phone (try NOT to do this except in an emergency). Be aware that other things come up that you may not have thought of – you need to have money on hand in case of an emergency.

There are many things you may want to purchase while you are here – please use your money wisely and budget well. You are here for 10 months! You do not have to buy everything at once! If you are having a hard time saving your money for things you need, and seem to spend it all at once, talk to your host family or community rep about how you can budget your money better.

DO NOT BORROW MONEY AND DO NOT LEND MONEY TO ANYONE!!!

You are responsible for your money – if you have money and need to purchase something, do not tell your host parents you are broke, or that your parents cannot afford to send you the required \$200 per month – that is against the State Department rules and will be reported. If your parents cannot afford to send you the required amount of personal spending money each month, it can be grounds for you to return home immediately.

Settling in with Your Host family

Now that you have arrived, is your host family and home everything you thought it would be? Did you have an image of how life was going to be in America, and pictured a mansion on the beach with a pool in the backyard? These are images only portrayed in the movies or on TV. The majority of American families have medium sized homes, live in neighborhoods with houses close together, and have small or big yards, with and without swimming pools. The most important part of your home is the family that lives inside. Americans are generous and accommodating and they value family relationships overall. No matter the size of your home, your host family is providing you a safe and loving place to live during your time on the program. Accept their generosity and be grateful that they have allowed you into their home.

No matter how much you learn to love your host family, there are certain situations that you won't agree with. There might be many things that are different then they are back home, and you don't like the change. Maybe you are upset that you have to be home at a certain time each night, or that you cannot go out on a school night at all. Your host parents might limit your time on the internet, or tell you that you must be in bed by a certain time. They also want to know where you are going when you leave the home, and expect you to be back at a certain time. This is typical for an American family, and you need to accept these rules whether you agree with them or not.

The less you communicate with your host family, the more problems you will have. If you choose to come home from school and go straight to your room and on the computer, your host family will think you are unhappy with them and start to wonder why they are hosting you. If you decline their invitations to do family activities with them, they will again wonder if you are just using their home as a place to stay until school is over. That is not the point of the program, and you will learn nothing about American culture if you refuse to participate. It does you no good to be on the computer in the middle of the night, talking to your parents or friends from back home till late in the evening about how miserable you are, how you hate where you live and go to school, and how you thought America would be so much different. Your experience will be a waste if you refuse to think positive! Join a school club, or a sports team. Watch your host family's favorite TV show with them to show you are interested. Offer to make a meal that is special in your home country for the whole family to try. Ask your host family to take you on a bike ride to show you the neighborhood. The more involved you are, the richer the experience. At the same time, you should not expect your host family to drop everything they are doing to take you to the mall, drop you off at your friend's house, or take you to a school function at the last minute. Everyone has busy schedules, and the more advanced planning you can do with your host family, the better and happier everyone will be. Try not to be too disappointed if your host family is not available to take you somewhere that you wanted to go – plan ahead for the next time.

Not With Me!!

Sexual abuse rarely occurs during a student's exchange program. However, AFICE wants to inform you how to recognize sexual abuse so you do not become a victim.

While on your exchange program, it can be hard to understand different family and cultural behaviors. And while sharing affection is one of the nicest things in the world, it is possible that someone will show affection that makes you feel uncomfortable.

If you feel uncomfortable due to attention that you are receiving, physical or otherwise, tell that person to STOP! Try not to be alone with that person. If the behavior continues do not tolerate it! Tell your community rep immediately about what you are feeling. It is never too late to let someone know.

Your body belongs to you!

Your body is your business – you have the right to determine your body's boundaries

Trust your feelings – you should take your feelings seriously. Listen to your intuition

You decide who can touch you – you have the right to decide how, when, where and whom you want to be touched

You have the right to say NO! – It is always okay to say NO

It is not your fault – the abuser is the one responsible. It is never your fault. Nothing about what you say, the way you look, or how you behave gives anyone the right to use or hurt you.

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse can include different types of activities, such as;

Becoming the object of suggestive looks or comments, being made to kiss someone, touching private parts of the body, being made to engage in unwanted sex or sexual acts, being made to look at pornographic videos, magazines or websites, or other behaviors that make you uncomfortable and continue after you've asked that they stop.

Who is an abuser?

The abuser can be an adult or older child. Many times the abuser is someone you know such as a neighbor, friend of the family, or family member. The abuser can be someone that you look up to, or trust.

The abuser may threaten you to make you do what they want you to do. Or they may make you feel guilty so you keep quiet. They may be older or bigger than you and you may be afraid they might threaten you or hurt you if you tell someone. They may threaten to report you as breaking a rule, or tell you that you will be sent home early if you say anything.

You should never be afraid of telling another adult of these circumstances. The abuser is more afraid of getting caught – that is why they make threats. You should tell your community rep or another trusted adult, and not fear any consequences in doing so. Do not stay silent.

If you feel that you are the victim of sexual abuse, contact your community rep or dial 911 immediately!

Frequently Asked Questions

After you have arrived and settled in to your host family and school routine, you may be more relaxed and feel that there are questions you need to ask that you don't want to bother anyone with. Here are some frequent things that come up during a typical exchange year.

What are Americans daily hygiene habits?

Most people in the United States are very particular about personal hygiene.

*People shower daily, wash their hair often, and use deodorant. Body odor is NOT accepted.

*They wash or clean their clothing often and change their underwear daily.

*They brush their teeth at least twice a day.

*Females usually shave their legs and underarm hair.

*They practice safe hygiene by washing their hands after using the bathroom and before preparing food.

In order for you to fit in at home and school, it is important for you to follow the hygiene customs of your host family

Do all families go to church every week?

Religious activities play an important role in the life of many families and individual in the U.S.

*Host families share all aspects of their lives with you and while you are not obligated to attend church or church activities, it is often a good way to make friends and practice the language.

*You may be asked to attend church, a synagogue or temple on a few occasions – give it a try!

*If you choose not to participate, respect and be tolerant of you host family's beliefs just as they would be of yours.

Will I be able to get a Driver's License and drive a car while I am here?

Under **NO** circumstances are you to obtain a Driver's License, or drive a car while you are on the exchange program. Doing so will cause you to be terminated from the program and you will be sent home immediately.

Can I get a job while I am here?

Students are not allowed to have secure employment while they are on the program. Some students ask if they can babysit for a friend or neighbor, or mow their lawn – these are perfectly acceptable for you to do and a way for you to earn a small amount of money, but these activities must not exceed 10 hours a week.

Discipline

Just because your parents paid for you to participate in an exchange program does not mean you cannot be sent home in the middle of the program. If warranted, you **CAN** and **WILL** be sent home.

Disciplinary action may be taken for either academic or behavior purposes, or both. If you follow the AFICE rules, you should not have a concern. If you don't, you should be aware of the disciplinary action that will be taken.

What constitutes academic disciplinary action? No student can receive an 'F' (Failure) grade on their semester report card. Any student who receives an 'F' will be sent home immediately. This is because by the time the first semester ends, you should have had plenty of notice from your teachers (via school progress reports) that you were in jeopardy of Failing your class, and should have worked extremely hard to get a better grade. There are no second chances for getting a Failing grade on ANY subject on your semester report card. If you should receive an 'F' grade on any subject on any of your school progress reports, you will be required to complete an academic behavior report, showing that you are aware of the problems you need to work on and understand that failure to do so will result in you returning home.

What constitutes behavior disciplinary action? Students who continually disobey host family rules or continue to have rude and unacceptable behavior towards their host family will be subject to go home instead of being placed in another host family. AFICE has strict guidelines to follow in regards to students that continually cause problems. These problems include disobeying house rules regarding computer time, staying up too late, not following good hygiene, not cleaning up after themselves, and continually isolating themselves in their bedrooms. It can also be spending too much time communicating with friends and family back home, or it can be interference from your natural parents about what you should and should not be doing. AFICE takes all these circumstances very seriously, and just because you, or your natural parents do not like the rules your host family has put into place for you to follow, does not mean you can do as you please, enough to have your host family resent you and ask that you move. This is not a condition for changing host families. When your behavior has been such that you are in jeopardy of being sent home, your host family will contact your community rep, who will then write up a Behavior Report. You will sign the report with a promise to change the problems that you have been having, and work towards having a better relationship to your host parents and the program. This Behavior Report will also be a 'probationary period' – which means you have a short amount of time to show that you will do better and work on the problems noted in the Behavior Report. You cannot change host families during this time. If during this 'probation' period your host family feels you are not making the effort needed, you will be sent home. AFICE does not place students with new host families unless they show that their behavior will change for the better.

The exchange program is a privilege for you to better your education, perfect your English, and learn about the American culture. Please treat this privilege with respect.

Your Community Rep

Before you arrived, you were assigned a Community Rep. This person is in charge of overseeing your stay while you are on the program, to help you out with any problems you may be having, and the person you will be able to communicate with on every level.

You should always contact your community rep if you are having problems with your host family, or school. Sometimes you might feel like your host family doesn't understand you, or you may be having a hard time understanding them – talking to your host family first will be the best solution, but your community rep is only a phone call or email away if you feel that no one is understanding you.

Your community rep is required to contact you at least once a month. This contact can be over the phone, through Email, Skype or maybe a text message. Don't wait for them to contact you if you feel there is something you need to discuss with them right away – when you feel something needs to be talked about urgently, contact them as soon as possible so they can help you. If your community rep is not contacting you on a regular basis, you should contact the AFICE main office to let them know.

Think about this scenario; You have been with your host family for a short time. You feel like you aren't fitting in, and don't understand why they aren't communicating with you more, or are getting upset for you spending too much time on your computer. They want you to make your bed and pick up your clothes, and this is something your own parents never made you do. Who would be the first person you would call to complain to? If you said your natural parents, that would be the wrong answer! It should be your community rep!

If the first thing you did was call your natural parents every time you didn't like something that someone said to you, or anytime someone told you to clean up after yourself, then the first thing your natural parents would feel is unhappiness that you are upset and miserable. The last thing they want is for their child to come all the way to the U.S. only to have a terrible experience. This is not the right approach. Your parents are many, many, miles away, and the more you complain to them, the more upset they will be, and will only try to fix the problem from far away. The right approach is to contact your community rep! They live close by, and they are able to find solutions to your problems without panicking! Your community rep understands that not everything is as broken as it seems, and not everything that is broken has to be fixed immediately. It takes time to find solutions and understand everyone's point of view. This is what the program is all about.

Not all community reps are able to host vacations or parties with students. If your community rep does not have any special occasions set aside for you and the other exchange students in your area, then it would be a good idea for you to join a school or church club. These types of clubs usually plan outings to different areas which you might not be able to see otherwise. Your community rep can help you find a club or teen church group to join should you choose to.

Be open to all ideas and experiences – make the most out of every day, and always contact your community rep if you have questions, or just need someone to talk to.

Rules to Remember

Here is a quick list of some of the rules to remember about your exchange year in the U.S.:

- 1. No smoking**
- 2. No drinking of alcoholic beverages including beer and wine**
- 3. No ingesting of any non-prescribed drugs or illegal drugs**
- 4. No association with anyone involved with drugs in anyway**
- 5. No engaging in any illegal activity**
- 6. No driving of any automobile or motorized vehicle at any time**
- 7. No Hitchhiking**
- 8. No traveling outside your area without your host family**
- 9. No relatives or friends of family can visit you during your stay**
- 10. School grades must be maintained at a 'C' or above at all times**

Violation of any of the above is grounds for you to return to your home country immediately

Here are the things to remember to make your stay a rewarding experience;

- 1. I will abide by the rules of my host family and help with chores if necessary**
- 2. I will limit my time on the internet and spend more time socializing in person**
- 3. I will not expect my host family to pay for any of my personal expenses, such as a cell phone, clothing, or entertainment**
- 4. I will show independence by helping prepare my food, make my bed, and keeping the areas I use clean**
- 5. I will make sure my natural parents send me the required money needed each month for me to pay for my personal expenses, and will not ask my host parents for money**
- 6. I will ask my host parents to explain something if I don't understand**
- 7. I will respect my host parents' house rules pertaining to computer time**
- 8. I will be a good student at school, complete all assignments, and ask for help when I need it.**
- 9. I will not make any major changes to my appearance or body during my stay**
- 10. I will always tell my host family where I am going and who I will be with**