



# Cross-Cultural Experiences

Stages & Guidelines for  
Host Family/Student Relationship

## Homestay Manual

Host Family Edition

---

**ERDT enVision**  
**Tracy M. Gautier, Director**

17914 Los Vasos Street  
Fountain Valley, CA 92708  
714.594.3634 (office) 714.242.1421 (fax)  
[tgautier@erdtenvision.org](mailto:tgautier@erdtenvision.org)

---

Dear American Host Family,

On behalf of Educational Resource Development Trust (ERDT) enVision, we welcome your decision to host an enVision cultural exchange participant. This is a unique opportunity for you to experience first-hand the richness and diversity of a culture different from your own. Through this program, you are among thousands of American Families who volunteer to serve as citizen ambassadors of the United States. The good will of American host families in opening their homes to these young international visitors is essential to the success of the program. Thank you!

The health, safety and well-being of the young people who participate are, collectively, our highest priority. A host family has many responsibilities, the most important of which is the care of a young person from a foreign country during their involvement in a cultural exchange program. The foreign student is a guest in your home and in our country and you may be the first "real Americans" they encounter. How you interact with this student will create a powerful image about our country and its people.

We hope this will be a positive and rewarding experience for you and the exchange student. It is extremely important that you notify your EPC if you have any concerns or questions.

In the following pages, your Exchange Program Coordinator (EPC) has attached all the information pertinent to your program. Please, make sure that you read it carefully.

We are truly appreciative of your kindness and generosity in making this educational and cultural experience possible. We look forward to sharing this adventure with you!

Sincerely,

---

Exchange Program Coordinator



---

Tracy M. Gautier  
Director  
ERDT enVision

# Cross-Cultural Experiences

## Stages & Guidelines for Host Family/Student Relationship Host Family Edition

### STAGE 1 – ARRIVAL AIRPORT AND ARRIVAL INFORMATION

1. Be flexible—anything can happen with flights!
2. Call your EPC if something occurs to prevent you from arriving at the welcome party or pick up spot on time. In this way your student understands that an emergency occurred and that they were not "forgotten".
3. Remember to make a Welcome sign for your student—in their native language is nice! Balloons, flowers, etc may also help them to identify you.
4. Ask before you hug. Culturally, we hug when we first meet a special someone, some cultures may feel uncomfortable with this kind of physical contact.
5. Expect students to be excited—but possibly quiet on the ride home. Remember, they may have been traveling for over 24 hours—it may be well past midnight in their home country. Don't be upset if they do not talk much!
6. When you get home, give them a shortened tour of your home, their room, and the bathroom they will be using. Show them how to use the bathroom—toilet and shower. Don't forget minor details like which side of the tub the shower curtain goes on when the water is running—unless you don't mind a flood in your bathroom! Tell them where clean towels are and where dirty laundry goes. Ask them if they would like to freshen up (take a shower or just wash their face and hands).
7. Ask them if they are hungry—we have found that a light meal works best—soup, a simple sandwich (ham or turkey are usually safe) on a roll, or fresh fruit.
8. At bedtime (probably shortly after they arrive home) make sure they know that we sleep between the top and bottom sheets on the bed—unusual for most European/Asian countries. Explain what pillow shams are and that they are to be removed from the bed when sleeping. If you have central heating or air, make sure they know this and tell them not to open the window—also unusual for most countries.

## DAY 1 – POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Your student probably needs rest.
- You will need to provide a short orientation fairly immediately.
- Make sure your student knows you are available for help and to answer any questions.
- Let them know it is ok to make mistakes with you.
- Start off on the right foot – **don't** “wait” on your student. **Do** show them how to help themselves. You'll thank yourself later!

## TOPICS FOR IMMEDIATE DISCUSSION

### 1. **Jet Lag & Health Concerns.**

- Encourage naps & expect irregular sleeping & eating patterns.
- Ask about stomach upsets, including diarrhea or constipation and be prepared to offer medication or advice as you would to your own children.
- Ask about any medications (prescription & non-prescription) your student may use.
- Girls may need help buying feminine products soon after arrival – good to have some supplies on hand and **be clear about proper disposal of feminine products.**

### 2. **Silence & Conversation**

- Talking is the American way of being comfortable with strangers. The general rule is that the closer the relationship, the more comfortable American's are with silence.
- Make sure you initiate conversation by asking simple questions like what your student's parents do for work, what are the student's favorite subjects in school, etc.
- Share pictures from your last vacation, or share a family photo album.

### 3. **Personal Space, Privacy & Property**

- Your student may not have the same ideas about what is a personal belonging and what is meant for the entire family to use – be specific about personal property, space, and privacy.
- In other cultures, parents and children do not spend a lot of time together after school. It is not unusual for a teenager to spend most of the time in their bedroom with the door closed, listening to music or doing homework, without much interaction with the adults of his/her family.
- Your children may be excited to have a new member of the family. They may want to spend a lot of time with the participant. Keep in mind this may become overwhelming, especially if they do not have younger siblings. Talk to your student, be understanding and help your participant to know how to communicate their need for privacy to the younger children in the home.
- **Make sure to remind them to keep all of their valuable documents, electronics and property locked in their suitcase at all times. This will protect them from inadvertent loss or damage.**

### 4. **Orientation to Your Home** – Many items work differently in other countries (showers, toilets, appliances, electronic equipment) so you will want to be sure they understand how everything works – but to avoid insulting them, it is best to ask questions like “what, if anything, looks different about our bathroom?” rather than explaining things that they already understand. Some key areas to focus on would be:

- The shower, toilet, bathroom fan.

- The stove - many Europeans/Asians will be used to gas stoves. Be sure they realize that electric burners stay hot longer.
  - Microwaves – they may not have one at home.
  - Clothes dryers – probably don't have one at home. Some of their clothes may not be dryer-safe, so make them responsible for telling you what cannot go into the dryer. Explain how to clean the lint trap, etc.
  - Self-locking doors – probably won't be used to this & may find themselves on the wrong side of a locked door!
  - It is customary in the United States to tell guests to "help yourself". Clearly explain to the participant what this means and that is not impolite for them to get a snack or food without assistance.
5. **Your Student's Bedroom Area** –Consider leaving a "Welcome Kit" on their desk/bedside table. Some items to consider: airmail stamps; a small telephone directory with important phone numbers in it (your work phone numbers, neighbor's phone numbers, extended family member numbers); a house key; a 3 X 5 card with family members names, your address & phone number (for them to carry in their wallet); a bilingual dictionary. You also may want to consider a stuffed animal bearing a note such as "They told me you were coming. I'm so glad you're finally here! I hope you will give me a name soon. I'm really looking forward to being your best friend."
  6. **Family Bulletin Board or Calendar** – Point it out to your student. It's a good idea to post mealtimes, when people get up, evening curfew, etc. During the program, there will be times that the participant may need your help with transportation. Please emphasize how far in advance you may need notice of this scheduled activity.
  7. **Decisions about Names** – It's often difficult for students to decide what to call their host parents. Discuss it openly. Allow them to decide if they feel comfortable calling you Mom & Dad or by your first names. Ask them how to pronounce their name correctly & if you are using the name they prefer. Avoid giving them a nickname unless you discuss it with them.
  8. **Pets** – Your student may not understand how much your pet is a part of your family and the liberties they have in your home. Discuss it with them.
  9. **Family Prayers** – If your family is religious, it is important to discuss how your religious practices affect your daily life. Explain what will transpire and ask if they wish to participate. Try something like "*We do not want our prayers to make you uncomfortable. It is not our attempt to convert you to our ways. However, prayer before meals is important to us. We hope you will respect this and understand our spiritual needs. We will do our best to understand yours.*"
  10. **Personal Hygiene** – In some countries it is customary to shower two to three times a day. In others, two to three times a week. Discuss what is customary in your family. Encourage use of deodorants if necessary. Some girls could smell like they bathe in perfume; boys in aftershave lotion. Remember, odors we find acceptable, may be distasteful to others. Discuss with your student when is a good time for them to use the shower and how long should their shower or bathroom use be.

## COMMUNICATION HELPS

- Language Fatigue – Speaking English continuously can be nerve wracking & exhausting for your student. Be creative with the way you communicate if necessary. Draw pictures, play "charades", post signs around the house.
- Speak slowly and distinctly...avoid contractions like "doncha – don't you", "do you wanna – do you want to", "yep – yes", "nope – no".
- Don't correct every mistake they make. When you do correct, do so kindly. Don't laugh at them. Only correct those that will get your student in trouble or laughed at.

- Repeat important thoughts/rules, several times in different ways. Ask them to repeat these thoughts back to you in their own words to be sure they understand.
- Be prepared to explain that the use of foul language is not acceptable...or that some words are inappropriate. They may just be repeating what they have heard in casual teenage conversation. Or in their country, it may not be as offensive as it is here.
- It's good to have a foreign language/English dictionary available for those difficult to communicate words. When cooking, let them smell the spice, or taste it. Show them pictures.
- Encourage communication! Don't accept simple "yes" or "no" answers. Ask questions that require more of an explanation.
- Let them know it is OK to make mistakes with you. You are here to help them. They don't have to speak the language perfectly to be understood.

### TOPICS FOR LATER DISCUSSION

1. **Mealtime** – Don't expect your student to like everything that you prepare, and don't take it personally if they do not like a particular dish. (Do you like snails, rats, octopus, & horse meat?) Encourage family members to go first when food is passed around the table so your student can follow their example of appropriate **portions & how foods are eaten**.
2. **Safety Concerns – Discuss the following issues with your student:**
  - The importance of locking doors
  - How to handle phone calls from strangers
  - How & when to answer the door
  - The dangers of accepting rides from strangers
  - Places to avoid
  - How to call the police, fire department, or ambulance in an emergency
3. **Community Orientation** – Introduce them to important places in the community, but go slowly. Try not to visit more than one place per day. Places to consider: the post office, bank, convenience store, pharmacy, etc. Help them identify key landmarks so they can give directions to your home if necessary.
4. **U.S. Money**
  - Familiarize your student with the denominations of our coins.
  - Explain sales tax –In many other countries, you pay what is marked on the tag, as there is no sales tax.
  - Explain when they should tip & how much. Restaurants & hairdressers are the 2 most probable areas where this will be an issue.
  - Make it very clear what you expect your student to pay for; for example:
    - a. Stamps
    - b. Snack foods (something of their preference other than you have in your home)
    - c. Family activities – If you are planning an outing, let the student know in advance how much it is going to cost them. Make sure they have money with them BEFORE you leave the house.
  - **Don't ever lend money to your student and don't borrow money from them.**
5. **Phone Usage - Consider the following points:**
  - Your student is responsible for paying all of his or her own phone bills.
  - STUDENTS ARE TO CALL THEIR PARENTS USING THEIR PERSONAL CELL PHONE OR VIA E-MAIL.
  - We strongly discourage use of host family's phone as students will have opportunities to contact their families to advise them of their safe arrival. Although they may have purchased a calling card in their country, there is often

- a \$5.99 per minute "connection charge" associated with the cards that is billed to the phone number used.
- Be sure your student knows what the local pre-fixes are in your area to ensure they are not making calls thinking they are free only to find out they have a \$50 phone bill at the end of their stay. The concept of local calls being "free" will be new to most of your students. At home, most of them pay for all calls by the minute.
  - Explain that calls to 900 area codes are not only, not free, but are quite costly. Ask them to check with you before they decide to call the Psychic Hotline!
  - Explain how to use 911 responsibly.
  - Set guidelines as to when it is a good time for your student to get calls from overseas and have them pass this information on to friends & family at home.
  - Tell them how late it is acceptable to receive (or make) phone calls in your home, even to their friends here in the States.
  - Don't be afraid to limit phone time or the length of phone calls...just as you would with your own children.
  - Explain how to use "call waiting" if you have it. How will your student know if there is another call coming in? Is it necessary for them to discontinue their call if there is a call coming in for someone else in the family?
  - Cell phones – we discourage the use of ones brought from home as a means of staying in contact with those back home. Text messaging is too easy and will only exacerbate homesickness and becomes an obstacle with your bonding experience. Discuss this with your student and ask them to refrain from using their phone during family time.
  - If you receive a bill with unpaid phone charges after student departure, please notify your coordinator immediately!

#### **6. Computer/Internet Usage**

- It is strongly recommended that computer access have a password so you can control when your student is accessing your system.
- Set a limit on the time your student may spend on the computer/day. If they're spending too much time on the computer, they're not interacting appropriately with you.
- Explain to your student that they may not download anything (including IM programs, music and videos!) to your system.
- Some students may arrive with laptops. As long as they don't abuse them, it's OK.
- Program rules require that laptops be used in a common area of the house. Please show your student where he/she may use their computer. If computer usage becomes an issue due to the extended amount the student uses their computer, please notify your coordinator so we can help solve this issue.

#### **7. Health Insurance and Doctor's Visits**

- Students arrive with health insurance coverage.
- ALWAYS contact your coordinator first prior to taking your student to the Doctor (In case of a life threatening emergency use your best judgment for treatment and contact your coordinator immediately once the student is stable).
- Health care is handled quite differently in many countries and students do not understand that there is no free health care in the US. They may request to see a Doctor for very minor issues that can be treated with medication they brought or over the counter medicine.
- Doctor visit co-payments are due at the time of service; students must submit a receipt to their insurance for reimbursement of the cost of the visit and medications.
- It would be helpful if you remind your student to bring their Health Care coverage information and sufficient money or a credit card to pay for services.

- If participant is an adult, ensure that your information is not disclosed as to not make you the principal financial responsible party. It is OK for the student to give your address as their residence while in the US.

## STAGE 2 – SETTLING IN DISRUPTION OF FAMILIAR FAMILY ROUTINES

### Points to consider:

- Another person is using the bathroom.
- Another person's TV preferences must be considered.
- Another person is using the telephone.
- Another person is making midnight raids on the refrigerator.
- New concerns regarding privacy.
- Your children might react negatively to the additional attention shown to the student by you, extended family, or friends.

### What to do:

- Explain (in detail) how things are done in your family and **REMEMBER...**you can't explain your expectations or expect your student to adapt to your way of life if there is no consistency in the expectations of your family members first!
- Devise new routines and **be specific!** Discuss all issues with everyone involved and come up with a specific, workable solution. **For example, it is better to give everyone a specific, allotted time in the bathroom than to make a blanket statement that everyone must get in and out faster in the morning.**
- Encourage everyone (family members & your student) to be as flexible as possible... and willing to compromise.
- Expect some irritability. Talk with your children. Emphasize that their feelings are coming from the changes they are experiencing, not directly because of the new person in your home and that this discomfort is TEMPORARY.

### NOTICING IMPERFECTIONS

Don't fabricate your student into a "Dream" Student.

**Remember...**they are normal, ordinary teenagers or young adults who will

- Make mistakes
- Break things
- Hurt your feelings
- Get upset
- Say things in funny ways...

**Just like your own kids!**

### POINTS TO PONDER WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR FAMILY "CULTURE"

1. **Do you believe that acknowledging individual achievement is good?** In the former Soviet Union that is not the case, teens strive to be part of a group.



2. **When having a conversation with a friend, what is the optimal physical distance you should stand from the other person? What do you do (or feel) when someone moves too close to you?** This “comfortable” distance varies in other areas of the world.
3. **What is the proper way to hold a knife and fork when you cut food and eat it?** In Europe you hold the knife in your right hand and the fork in your left hand. It is even common to use a knife and fork to eat pizza and sandwiches. A European would never put their knife down to use their fork in their right hand while eating!
4. **How do you greet family members, close friends, and acquaintances?** In France you “kiss the air” on either side of someone’s face. In the Far East you bow your head slightly. In Germany you shake hands. In most Spanish speaking cultures you kiss on the cheek.
5. **Upon joining or leaving a gathering of friends, do you shake everyone’s hand?** In the Far East, this is the acceptable way of doing things. In Germany, when leaving a large, seated group it is acceptable to “knock” on the table instead of shaking hands.
6. **When do you usually have your main meal of the day?** In many areas of the world, the main meal is eaten at “lunch” time.
7. **Ladies, do you shave your legs/underarms and use deodorant?** In many cultures, women do not.
8. **How often do you shower/bathe?** In some more hot/humid countries, taking 2 or 3 showers/day is normal. In other areas, showering every day is considered wasteful and unnecessary.
9. **When you start to count using your fingers, which finger do you start with?** In Europe, they start with their thumb.
10. **Are showing someone the “ok” sign using your thumb & pointer finger, or “giving someone the finger” acceptable to you?** In Brazil, the “ok” sign is an obscene gesture, while in Scandinavia showing someone your middle finger isn’t considered obscene.
11. **Do you expect your children to help with household chores?** In some countries, the main responsibility of children is to do well in school. Period. Their “job” is to study hard and do well in school. In other countries it is common to have maids to care for the house cleaning.
12. **Do you eat potato chips, corn on the cob, lots of meat & cheese on a sandwich, and individual salad dressings?** In many cultures, potato chips are snack foods only, not to be eaten with meals; corn on the cob is “pig food”; and salads are prepared and served with a vinegar & oil dressing already on.
13. **Do you have a “top sheet” on your beds?** Not if you are in Europe. They use duvets only, the covers of which are removed and laundered frequently.
14. **How often do you say “thank you, excuse me, I’m sorry, & have a nice day” to people?** Many other cultures think Americans use these expressions superficially.
15. **Is it acceptable for your children to invite teens of the opposite sex into their bedroom and close the door?** In Europe it is.
16. **Do you expect to meet the friends of your children?** Hong Kong teens would never invite their friends home to meet their parents.
17. **Do you attend the games/musical performances, etc., of your children?** In many cultures, parents are not as actively involved in their children’s lives.
18. **Do your children have a curfew?** In many European countries, it is OK for teenagers to come home in the early hours of the morning.
19. **Do your children watch the news & read the newspaper every day?** In many European countries, teenagers are very politically aware. They can intelligently discuss what is happening in the world.

POINTS TO PONDER WHEN CONSIDERING HOUSEHOLD RULES

- **CHORES** – Be specific about your expectations. Don't say "Please go clean your room". Do show them what you want them to do, ie: picking up clutter, dusting the furniture, vacuuming the floor. Don't say "if you see something that needs to be taken care of, please just do it". Do say "we would like you to clear the table and put the dishes in the dishwasher every evening; we would like you to help fold the laundry; on Friday mornings we would like you to take the trash cans to the curb before you go to school."

- **BATHROOM ISSUES**

1. Where may your student keep their toilet articles?
2. Are there any special rules for bathroom care, such as wiping down shower walls or the bathtub. Should the shower curtain be open or closed when they are done taking a shower? Is the bathroom door to be left open or closed when it is not in use? Should they be sure the door is locked while in use for privacy?
3. What should girls do with used feminine products? Be sure they clearly understand what shouldn't be flushed.

- **FOOD ISSUES**

1. What may your student take for lunch? Who will make the lunch? When should it be made?
2. May friends be invited for dinner?
3. May your student snack whenever they want, on whatever they want? (ie, ice cream, soda, chips...an hour before dinner so they are not hungry for dinner?)
4. Are there any foods in the house that are earmarked for special meals, etc., and how will your student be able to identify them?

- **HOUSEHOLD ISSUES**

1. Public vs. private areas of your home (i.e., may your student enter your bedroom, your children's rooms without permission?)
2. May your student entertain friends in their bedroom? Of both sexes? May the door be closed?
3. May the student leave their suitcase in their bedroom so they can keep all of their valuables locked?
4. How should your student handle the invasion of their private space by younger siblings?
5. Are there things in your household that are common property (i.e., stapler, scissors, pens, etc.)? What is the proper procedure for using them and returning them?

- **FAMILY ISSUES**

1. When are family member birthdays and how are they celebrated?
2. Are there other special celebrations your student should be aware of?
3. Is there a family calendar? What is the procedure for putting events on it?
4. What should your student do if they are going to be late coming home?
5. What is the correct way to answer the telephone? Take a message?

## SETTING REALISTIC GOALS

### Ones that work

- Lifestyle sharing
- Learning about cultures (yours and others)
- Developing a friendship with a person from another culture
- Wanting to expose your children to cultural diversity

**Ones that don't**

- Learning to speak a foreign language
- A ready-made friend for your son/daughter
- A live-in babysitter

"Peace and Acceptance cannot be kept by force.  
It can only be achieved through understanding."

**Emergency Plan For Host Families**

*Host Parents – Please read carefully and keep in an accessible place.*

In the unlikely event there is a natural disaster in your area during the student's visit, please follow the procedures below:

- You, your family, and student follow your state or county emergency procedures and seek safety.
- Please keep your student with you.
- Please ensure the student has the information necessary to contact you should you get separated.
- Please contact an ERDT staff member in the order listed below until you reach someone in person.

Call First (Coordinator): \_\_\_\_\_

Call Second (Area Manager): \_\_\_\_\_


Call Third (Director): (714) 594-3634- Office (760) 220-2776- Cell

Call Last (ERDT's National Office): (800) 321-ERDT

- Please leave a message, if possible, with each party as you continue calling.
- Once you reach someone in person, there is no need to continue calling the next person listed.

Please note:

- It is possible that the people listed are also affected by the emergency and may not get the message, so it is important to continue calling until you have reached someone.
- Please contact us even if your family was not affected, or if you feel the news reports exaggerate the problem. Your student's family will



hear of the situation on the TV, radio, or Internet and will be extremely concerned until they know their student is safe.

**Thank you for your cooperation!**

