

Host Family Interview Resources

The Purpose of the Interview

The purpose of the interview is different for the host family than for the interviewer. For the interviewer, in accordance with AFS-USA and U.S. Department of State requirements, the primary purpose is to assess whether the family is suitable to host. This includes viewing and assessing the physical environment in the home, including where the participant would sleep and study. For the family, the primary purpose is to determine whether they would like to host, given the additional information provided to them during the interview regarding their role and responsibilities as an AFS Host Family.

Approaching the interview in this way, and describing it to the family as such, allows both the interviewer and the host family a graceful exit should either decide that this is not the right time for the family to host a student.

After the interview, family members will also:

- identify what would be expected of them as an AFS Host Family and what AFS expects of participants;
- become familiar with the support available to AFS Host Families and Participants at the local and national level;
- explore issues that may impact or influence the placement of a participant in their home such as smoking, dietary issues, and pets;
- reflect on their expectations of what the hosting experience might entail;
- receive answers to questions about their potential experience as an AFS Host Family.

The interview process will also allow the interviewer to determine what type of participant would be the best match for this family. ***Sensitive information may be shared during the interview or on Form C of the host family application and it is expected that this information be kept confidential.***

The host family interview should be conducted in the family's home and all members of the family should be present. If a member of the family is not present, a follow-up interview will need to be conducted with that individual before the student will be allowed to move into the home. The follow-up interview may be done in-person or over the phone.

Once completed, the AFS Volunteer should upload the completed form to Global Link, following the instructions on the Host Family Interview Form.

If you need assistance, contact your Team Development Specialist or your territory's Hosting Operations Coordinator.

Preparing for the Interview

- Prior to the interview, provide the family with general information about the history and mission of AFS and a Host Family Application.
- Call and set the appointment
- Ensure all family members will be present for the interview
- Outline expectations of interview & approximate time the interview will take

- Let the family know you will be asking for a tour of the home and to see the hosted student's room and sleeping arrangements for the coming year.
- Prior to the interview, please review the Host Family's application to determine if any of the required photos have yet to be submitted. If so, we encourage you to take and submit these photos on behalf of the family.

Conducting a Successful Interview

Successful host family interviews allow for a great deal of listening as well as talking. It's important to strike a balance between educating the family about the AFS hosting experience, and listening to the family talk about themselves, their lifestyle, and expectations. Every effort should be made to ensure that all family members are present, have a chance to express themselves, and respond to your questions. Here are a few other tips:

- During the interview, try to avoid the use of AFS jargon such as abbreviations or placement statuses.
- Begin the interview with easy questions and progress to more serious topics (see some suggested questions, below).
- Ask some questions directly to children/ host siblings and then ask parents to add their perspective.
- Briefly review the Host Family Agreement or make sure that all related topics are touched upon during the interview.
- Ask open-ended questions that will allow the family to talk spontaneously about a variety of issues. Ask clarifying questions as needed!
- Use specific examples to illustrate how AFS and other Host Families have dealt with issues related to the hosting experience
- Bring AFS memorabilia or DVDs to generate enthusiasm such as yearbooks, AFS scrapbooks, etc.

Some find that it is helpful to include a 2nd volunteer in the interview, so that one of you may facilitate and the other can observe family members and take notes.

Keep in mind that there are no "right" answers to many of these questions, but they can help identify any red flags.

Characteristics of Successful Host Families

While possessing the following qualities, skills, or attitudes alone will not ensure a successful hosting experience, a family who embodies them is much more likely to experience a positive intercultural exchange.

- An open mind and ability to communicate effectively
- Honesty, flexibility, and transparency in family dynamics
- A sense of humor, curiosity, warmth, and expression of feeling among family members
- Evidence of family unity. Hosting a student is challenging and a strong family is better equipped to deal with the difficult moments
- Family should "put on their best face" during the interview. If not, one might question how much effort they will put into the hosting experience.
- Willingness to make this a true mutual intercultural exchange
- A strong desire to make the participant a member of the family

Some Topics to Highlight

During the interview (perhaps when reviewing the Host Family Agreement) you may want to briefly cover the following topics and/or refer to the Host Family Handbook where additional information can be found. This will aid the family in their own decision-making process.

- AFS Medical Plan
- AFS Support System
- Finances – Who pays for what?
- Tentative dates or date range for required Host Family Pre-Arrival Orientation (and emphasize the requirement that family must attend)
- Tentative dates or date range for orientations and AFS Events in which participants are required/invited to participate
- Role of liaison and requirements for monthly contact
- Criminal background check requirement

Indicators that the family may not be suitable to host**:

- Division between the family members about whether to host.
- One or more family members absent from the interview.
- One family members does all the talking during the interview.
- Inability to spend enough time with a host participant due to work schedule or other commitments.
- A family who is not social or involved in the community.
- Unrealistic expectations of what hosting an exchange participant means for example, best friend, language tutor, baby-sitter for their child, or companion for an elderly family member.
- Very specific requests and expectations about the participant that they would like host i.e. “A 17-year-old Swedish girl who has younger siblings, excels academically, likes horseback riding and cooking.”
- Inappropriate comments made during the host family interview, for example that demonstrate intolerance towards a specific race, culture, or religion.
- Family is unable to provide own bed for participant.
- The home is unsafe or unsanitary.
- Evidence of substantial rigidity and/or a lack of a sense of humor among family members.
- An unsuccessful hosting experience with another exchange organization or with AFS in the past.
- Refusal to conduct criminal background check or comply with other AFS or Department of State requirements.

**A family that is not suitable to host, does not necessarily prevent them from being active with AFS.

After the Interview, please be sure and complete the electronic host family interview form and Upload it to Global Link. Instructions for doing so can be found on the Interview Form!