

TIPS FOR ADJUSTING: THE FIRST DAYS AND BEYOND

In the first days after Arrival, your host student may be tired, active, scared, fearless, insecure, overconfident, quiet, talkative, or somewhere in between. This is not the sum total of the child you will host all year!

What to do...

- Act naturally, be yourself.
- Don't assume anything.
- Explain "obvious" things. (ex: how to use the microwave safely, how to use the dishwasher correctly, etc.)
- Review and complete *The Student and Host Family Questionnaire* with the student.
- Speak very, very slowly and clearly.
- Establish your student's "member of the family" status right away – Don't do things in the beginning that you don't plan to do all year.
- Break the ice: bring a small gift to give to the student upon meeting him or her – a journal, balloon, t-shirt from your local area, key to the house, etc.
- Ask to see pictures of the student's home and family.
- Show your family photo album to your student.
- If possible, show the student a yearbook from the high school he or she will be attending.

Some typical challenges...

Language

- Even if the student's English is good, concentrated listening is difficult, extremely tiring and can cause headaches!
- Fatigue – from the journey, from the time change, from encountering so many new things and people, and speaking a non-native language.
- Students will fade in and out of conversations.
- Watch for slang or idioms that are clear to us, but totally foreign to our students. (ex: *I'm as cool as a cucumber, he tried to pull a fast one, etc.*)
- Be very clear with expectations – don't assume that the student understood you the first time!

School

- Before school starts, take student to school and show him/her around - how lockers work; where the cafeteria, library, bathrooms are; the bus stop, etc.
- Expect students to have anxiety – who to sit with at lunch, how to get from class to class, meeting American kids, how to make friends, the language, etc. Reassure student that this is normal and will pass.
- Encourage students to stick with classes that seem hard at first, since "easy" classes can lead to boredom in school.
- Let them know teachers often stay after school to assist students.
- Make a guidance appointment if you haven't already.
- Sometimes a student has been accepted by school, but the Guidance Department isn't aware, so now is a good time to track down the paperwork.
- Some schools require you to register your student, and ask for their passport; explain this is not required for exchange students but copy of passport can be made when student arrives.
- Health form addendum – student will bring updated form that must go to school nurse.
- We have sent immunization requirements with all host family information, but you should email your student to make sure he/she has gotten required immunizations.
- Student will bring updated school records, which should be brought to school as well.

- Give/send each teacher a letter or e-mail explaining that student is an AFS Student before classes start.

Sports

- Students may not be used to rigorous try-outs which may start the day after arrival.
- Sports physicals must be scheduled and are not covered by the AFS medical plan. (see *Host Family Handbook*)
- Student may not be aware that they must go to every practice.
- Students may not be aware of sports “seasons”.
- Let coach know what to expect – limited comprehension, need to speak slowly, differences in eye contact ≠ bad attitude, etc.

What can you do to raise your student’s spirits in low periods?

- Encourage students to relax in public areas of home, not in their bedroom.
- Get them out and about – go for walks, bike rides, to the grocery store, take them to the library to get a library card, etc.
- Play simple card games or board games. (ex: start a “Family Game Night”)
- Watch TV and movies with closed captions in English.
- Ask students questions about life in their home country and culture
- Discourage frequent texting and phone calls to home.
- Help them find something to occupy them that is the same or like something they enjoy doing in their home country.
- Make sure they establish good sleeping habits.
- Encourage physical exercise.
- Make sure they are enrolled in at least one elective, and encourage extra-curricular activities, to help them make friends at school.
- Help them seek out opportunities to help others, such as community service activities or volunteering
- Encourage them to be in contact with their liaison.