

Tips for the First Days

In the first days after Arrival, your participant may be tired/hyper, 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 and just be yourself.
- Don't assume anything.
- Explain and demonstrate anything you think is the "obvious/common-sense" because clear, specific instructions are essential!
- Speak very, very slowly and clearly.
- Establish your participant'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 participant upon meeting them. (ex: a journal, balloon, t-shirt from your local area, key to the house, etc.)
- Ask to see pictures of the participant's home and family.
- In the first 2-3 weeks, review and discuss the "Participant and Host Family Questionnaire" to establish clear expectations and family rules

Some typical challenges...

Language

- Even if the participant'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
- Participants will fade in and out of conversations
- Once again, speak very slowly, even more slowly than you think is necessary
- Watch for slang or idioms that are clear to us, but totally foreign to our students.
- Be very clear with expectations – don't assume that the participant understood you the first time!

School

- Before school starts, take participant to school and show him/her around - how lockers work; where the cafeteria, library, bathrooms are; the bus stop, etc.
- Expect great anxiety – Who to sit with at lunch, how to get from class to class, meeting American kids, how to make friends, the language, not used to electives, changing classrooms, etc. Reassure participant that this is normal and will pass.
- Encourage participants to stick with classes that seem hard at first, otherwise boredom will set in later on
- Let them know teachers often stay after school to assist students
- Make a guidance appointment if you haven't already

- Sometimes a participant has been accepted by a 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 participant, and ask for their passport; explain this is not required for exchange students but copy of passport can be made when participant arrives
- Health form addendum – participant 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 participant to make sure he/she has gotten required immunizations
- Participant will bring updated school records which should be brought to school as well
- Give/send each teacher a letter or e-mail explaining that participant is an AFS Student before classes start

Sports

- Participants 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)
- Participant may not be aware that they have to go to every practice
- Participants 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 participant's spirits in low periods?

- Encourage participants to spend time in common/shared areas of home, not just 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, rent videos with closed captions in English
- Encourage participants to talk about life back home but discourage a lot of e-mails and phone calls to home
- Help them find something to occupy them that is the same or similar to something they like to do at home
- Make sure they establish good sleeping habits. They should not over-sleep or sleep too little
- Encourage physical activity/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. Taking their mind off their own situation will actually lessen the homesickness
- Encourage them to be in contact with their liaison