

WELCOME TO AFS-USA'S HOST FAMILY ORIENTATION

This is the first module in a three-part series introducing you to hosting an international student with AFS-USA.

At any point you can use the buttons below or the menu on the left to navigate through this module.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completing this online learning module, you will be able to:

- Describe the history of AFS Intercultural Programs and identify its statement of Mission and Core Values
- List the four AFS Educational Objectives
- Identify common questions asked by host families and access the online Host Family Handbook
- List the various layers of support present within AFS Intercultural Programs
- Describe the role of an AFS Liaison and list contact and visit requirements

AFS HISTORY, MISSION & VALUES

Introduction

AFS is a leader in intercultural learning with a rich history dating back to 1914.

Since then over 350,000 participants have experienced cultural learning all over the world.

Today, AFS offers international exchange programs in more than 70 countries around the world through independent, nonprofit AFS partners run primarily by volunteers.

AFS History

Watch the video below to learn about some key moments in AFS history.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScEmUKQQ7j8>

AFS Mission Statement

AFS works toward a more just and peaceful world by providing international and intercultural learning experiences to individuals, families, schools, and communities through a global volunteer partnership.

AFS Core Values

AFS enables people to act as responsible, global citizens working for peace and understanding in a diverse world. It acknowledges that peace is a dynamic concept threatened by injustice, inequity, and intolerance.

AFS seeks to affirm faith in the dignity and worth of every human being and of all nations and cultures. It encourages respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language, religion, or social status.

AFS activities are based on our core values of dignity, respect for differences, harmony, sensitivity, and tolerance

AFS EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

An AFS experience removes a person from a familiar cultural environment and temporarily places him or her into a new cultural environment. Such unusual circumstances introduce repeated challenges of varying difficulty for the participant to cope with and overcome.

The AFS Educational Objectives focus on four component parts:

1. Personal Values & Skills
2. Interpersonal Relationships
3. Intercultural Knowledge & Sensitivity
4. Global Issues Awareness.

Personal Values & Skills

AFS prepares participants in advance and provides ongoing support and guidance throughout their exchange. Participants able to see a crisis as an opportunity for reassessing values, stretching capacities, and practicing new skills will gain the most. AFS participants also discover hidden aspects of themselves because of their reflection and new found perspective.

AFS experiences lead to participants being able to:

- Think creatively
- Resolve conflicts
- Accept more responsibility for themselves
- Be more aware of oneself
- Feel confidence in one's self worth and abilities
- Define self in terms of ideals and values rather than economic status
- Succeed in different academic settings.4 (Slide Layer)

Interpersonal Relationships

Every AFS participant becomes fully involved in daily living and working arrangements with a variety of people in the new environment.

Regardless of placement specifics, AFS participants gain new interpersonal skills enabling them to:

- Adapt to new environments
- Communicate in a different language
- Build intercultural friendships
- Deepen concern for and sensitivity to others
- Value human diversity
- Show appreciation to others

Intercultural Knowledge & Sensitivity

Most AFS exchanges include a formal learning component in which host nationals explain the social, political, economic, and religious structures of their country.

In the case of exchanges involving adult professionals, hosts and visitors both gain new skills and alternative concepts, leading to a sharpening of their talents

AFS experiences enable participants to:

- Expand knowledge of the host country and culture
- Increase understanding of one's own culture
- Comprehend the nature of cultural differences

Global Issues Awareness

Living in a place other than one's home culture often helps people to recognize that the world is one large community, a global island, in which challenges of one kind or another are shared by everyone everywhere.

AFS programs seek to help participants:

- Deepen interest in world affairs
- Better understand the causes of world conflict
- Search for solutions to worldwide problems
- Further world peace

Host Family Handbook

You are about to embark upon a major experience by hosting an AFS participant in your home. It is both an exciting time as well as one filled with many questions. Some of the questions in this section may be the same questions that you have. You probably have others, as well.

The first place to look for the answers to these and many other questions you may have is the Host Family Handbook. If you have not received a printed copy of the handbook in the mail, please contact AFS or click this link:

[Host Family Handbook](#)

Read through each of the common questions to the right to learn more about your role as an AFS Host Family.

ARE WE EXPECTED TO PROVIDE MEALS FOR THE AFS PARTICIPANT?

YES! As an AFS host family, you are expected to provide all meals for your AFS Participant. This includes either a prepared lunch for school days or an allowance to purchase lunch while at school.

See 'Host Family Agreement and The Basics' in the [Host Family Handbook](#).

WHAT ARE THE THREE MAIN RULES THAT APPLY TO ALL PARTICIPANTS?

AFS has three long-standing rules for participants:

NO DRUGS. NO DRIVING. NO HITCHHIKING.

These rules are in place for the participant's safety. If a participant is found to have violated any of these rules, they are subject to being sent home immediately. As AFS prefers not to send anyone home early, please help reinforce these three rules.

See 'Rules and Regulations' in the [Host Family Handbook](#).

SHOULD WE CONTACT OUR PARTICIPANT'S NATURAL FAMILY PRIOR TO OR DURING THE EXCHANGE?

YES! AFS encourages you to develop a friendly rapport with your participant's natural family. However, we discourage excessive communication with the natural family during the exchange experience.

Striking a healthy balance is often best done through occasional written letters or email messages updating the natural family on the progress of their son or daughter's exchange experience. They will greatly appreciate your efforts.

Feel free to write in English if you need to. The natural family will be able to find someone in their community who can translate, if necessary.

See 'Common Issues and Concerns' in the [Host Family Handbook](#).

WILL THE AFS PARTICIPANT GRADUATE AND RECEIVE A DIPLOMA DURING THEIR STAY?

MAYBE (no guarantees). AFS has very clearly informed all participants that each school district has its own policies regarding graduation diplomas. If the school district is willing to award a diploma to your exchange student, he or she will need to meet the specific requirements established by the district as well as the state.

If your student has been told that it is not possible to receive a diploma, please do not pressure the school to reverse this decision as doing so may impede future AFS placements in the school.

See 'School and Teenage Life' in the [Host Family Handbook](#).

DOES AN AFS PARTICIPANT NEED PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN CERTAIN ACTIVITIES?

YES! Verbal permission is not sufficient to participate in risky physical activities.

The participant's natural family will need to complete a Sports and Activity Waiver. You can initiate this process by contacting your local AFS volunteer liaison or AFS regional service center.

WHAT SORT OF HOUSEHOLD RULES ARE APPROPRIATE FOR AFS PARTICIPANTS?

We encourage you to set and communicate clear rules and healthy boundaries for your participant, such as a curfew or household chores.

It is extremely important to put these measures into place from the start of the experience. Having a clear understanding of what is expected early on will facilitate the participant's integration into your family.

See 'Family Relationships' in the [Host Family Handbook](#).

SHOULD I SET A LIMIT ON THE PARTICIPANT'S COMMUNICATION WITH PEOPLE BACK HOME?

YES! It is a good idea to limit the amount of time your AFS Participant spends communicating with friends and family back home via computer or other means.

Excessive telephone, Skype or email contact between your participant and his/her natural family may hinder your participants' adjustment, prolong homesickness, and disrupt their overall experience.

See 'Natural Family Contact' in the [Host Family Handbook](#).

WHAT DOES THE AFS MEDICAL PLAN PROVIDE FOR PARTICIPANTS?

Medical issues may arise during the exchange experience. While the AFS medical plan covers most situations, there are exceptions. Standard dental work, vaccinations, sports physicals, chest x-rays, and vision care are not covered by the AFS medical plan.

If the AFS Participant requires any of these services, it is the natural family's responsibility to cover the cost. The Host Family can be most helpful by locating local service providers when needed.

See 'Medical Concerns' in the [Host Family Handbook](#) and [AFS Medical Plan](#) for details.

MAY AFS PARTICIPANTS TRAVEL INDEPENDENTLY?

YES (with approval)!

Some AFS Participants may travel independently during their exchange experience. All independent travel requests must be approved by a local volunteer, AFS-USA staff, the staff in the participant's home country, and their natural family at least two weeks prior to the student's departure date.

- First, the host family and local volunteers need to approve the proposed trip.
- The participant also needs to contact his or her natural family, who will then need to complete and sign a travel waiver with the AFS office in their country.
- The AFS Partner office will send this form to AFS staff in the United States.

The participant may not travel until all of these steps have been completed.

See 'Participant Travel While in the U.S.' in the [Host Family Handbook](#).

WHO SHOULD WE CONTACT IN CASE OF EMERGENCY?

First, we ask that you talk to your local AFS Volunteer. If the situation is urgent, they will help you report it to the AFS Support Staff, located in New York.

During business hours, and if you are unable to speak to your local volunteer, please call the AFS Service Center at 1-800-AFS-INFO / 1-800-237-4636 and ask for the Support Department.

After business hours, if it is an emergency and you are unable to reach or uncomfortable talking to your local AFS Volunteer, please call the AFS Emergency Duty Officer at 1-800-AFS-INFO / 1-800-237-4636.

See 'How do we get Help?' in the [Host Family Handbook](#).

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP OUR PARTICIPANT ADJUST TO LIFE IN THE U.S.?

You can begin by learning a bit about your participant's culture prior to his or her arrival.

See 'Cultural Learning' in the [Host Family Handbook](#).

Once your participant arrives the most important thing you can do is to keep the lines of communication open between all host family members.

Please ensure that you and your participant attend all orientations offered by AFS in your area. AFS orientations are designed to help both you and the participant get the most out of your AFS experience.

See 'Adjusting to a New Culture' in the [Host Family Handbook](#).

AFS SUPPORT & CHAIN OF COMMUNICATION

Throughout your exchange experience, AFS wants to offer you the best support possible.

We do this through a network of thousands of volunteers as well as our U.S. based staff.

Participant & Host Family

The primary relationship of any exchange experience is that of the AFS Participant and Host Family.

AFS designs its support programs with this relationship in mind, and our goal is to ensure your success together throughout the exchange experience.

AFS Liaison

The most immediate support that AFS provides is your local participant/host family liaison. This person is a registered AFS volunteer who has been specifically assigned to you. He or she can act as a resource for you, help you through cultural adjustments, and help you resolve issues as they arise.

Many AFS Liaisons have been AFS Participants and/or host families themselves. They understand the experience from the perspective of participating in it.

Your liaison is the first person you should contact if you have a question or concern.

Support Coordinators

As an extra layer of volunteer support, AFS has support coordinators who oversee larger territories.

These volunteers are experienced resources for liaisons. They also become directly involved working with host families and students when there are more serious issues.

AFS-USA Staff

The staff in AFS-USA's New York-based office support the volunteers in this country and are in direct communication with the staff in other AFS countries around the world.

AFS staff have many functions, including Support. When issues arise with students and host families, volunteers are trained to determine how and when to involve staff.

Staff always serve as the link in communication between the participants and volunteers in the host country and the home country. This ensures that many perspectives are objectively voiced and facilitates the flow of communication.

AFS Partner Staff

AFS staff in your participant's home country work with volunteers in their respective countries to resolve those issues and questions that can't or be resolved at the local level.

AFS Partner Volunteers

The volunteer structure varies around the world, but in every AFS partner country you will find volunteers who serve as a bridge between the parent of the participant and the staff in the partner office.

Emergency Duty Officer

The final element of this circle of support and communication is the AFS Emergency Duty Officer system.

In case of an emergency outside of regular business hours and you are unable to reach your liaison, you would contact the AFS Duty Officer at 1-800-876-2376.

AFS LIAISON MONTHLY CONTACTS

Overview

The U.S. State Department and the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET) require all organizations hosting participants in the United States to document monthly contacts with every participant and host family.

AFS matches each participant and host family with a volunteer Liaison to support them throughout the experience. AFS requires your Liaison to meet with each of you, family and hosted son or daughter, once per month.

Your AFS Liaison

Your AFS Liaison serves as your primary point of contact for any and all matters relating to hosting your AFS Participant. Your assigned liaison may not be a member of your family, a close personal friend of your family, or a teacher or administrator from your participant's school.

AFS recommends inviting the Liaison over to your home early in the process. Introduce him or her to your family and spend some time getting to know each other.

The Liaison's Role

As the primary person responsible for supporting you and your student, your assigned liaison is required to meet with each of you a minimum of once a month.

These meetings are opportunities for the liaison to check in with you and make sure all is going well.

Liaisons typically meet separately with students and with host families, which gives everyone an opportunity to speak freely.

Often, liaisons will meet with you at AFS orientations or casually in a coffee shop or restaurant. Get to know your Liaison, and utilize their support and experience when you need it.

Contact Requirements

AFS requires monthly contact between the Liaison and the participant and host family. An AFS representative, who may or may not be your Liaison, will maintain regular contact with the school throughout the exchange.

- The first monthly contact with the student must be in person.
- For year program participants two (2) monthly contacts with the host family must take place in person -- once during the fall and once during the spring.
- For semester program participants, one (1) monthly contact with the host family must take place in person.
- Someone other than the person who interviewed your family must visit your home within 60 days for permanent placements and within 30 days for welcome and temporary placements.

Contacting Your Liaison

You should always feel that you can contact your liaison with any questions or concerns you may have. You do not have to wait for your liaison to contact you. However there are certain situations in which you must contact your liaison:

- If your family and/or the participant are away from home for more than 24 hours, give contact details in case of an emergency.
- If serious issues arise, including but not limited to serious illness, injury, or hospitalization; arrest or detention by authorities; violation of AFS rules regarding driving, hitchhiking, or use of illegal drugs; potentially harmful or uncooperative behaviors or any other behavior patterns that cause concern to your family or family members.
- If you learn that your participant has had unexcused absences from school, has missed classes, is failing classes, or is having other academic problems.
- If you are considering hosting any other exchange participant, even if on a temporary basis, so that the U.S. State Department and the participant's natural family can be contacted for approval of the double placement.
- If contact from the natural family (via phone, letter, or email) interferes with the participant's adaptation process.
- In the event of any and all material changes in the status of the host family or student, including, but not limited to, changes in address, phone number, email address, finances, employment, and criminal charges or arrests of the participant or any member of the household. These changes must be reported to AFS immediately.

Contact Confidentiality

All contacts between AFS Liaisons, hosted participants and host families are kept confidential.

No information gathered by the Liaison about the host family will be shared with the participant. Only AFS Staff will have access to monthly contact information.

SUMMARY

You have now completed the first of three of AFS-USA's Host Family Orientation online modules. You should now be able to:

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- List the four AFS Educational Objectives
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