

Abbreviated AFS Student Learning Journey Curriculum

Student Monthly Learning Reflections

February 2016





LEARNING FOCUS AREA #1

Discovering & Developing Awareness of Cultural Differences

WHEN

Learning Focus Area #1 targets the first 1-2 months after the student's arrival. The actual timing will vary depending on the student.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

During this period, the student is settling into a new family and beginning life in a new school and community. Your early involvement with the student during this time will help establish a supportive relationship. Your goal is to develop a trusting relationship with the student for three primary reasons:

1. The student should be comfortable contacting you if there are challenges or problems.
2. You want to establish a solid foundation for your future learning partnership.
3. It is essential that both the student and their host family think of you as an experienced, supportive, knowledgeable and trustworthy person representing AFS. They should feel comfortable approaching you with questions and take your advice seriously.

The activities described in the Learning Focus Areas can help you develop a relationship with the student, and to jointly develop some observational and listening skills that will support learning in the months to come.



1st Month (Learning Focus Area #1)

ACTIVITIES FOR THE STUDENT WITH THE SUPPORT VOLUNTEER

During this time support volunteers reinforce the D.I.V.E. approach (see Resources) to intercultural encounters, which students should have been introduced to in the pre-departure orientation. We encourage you to emphasize during the D.I.V.E. process the idea of a neutral observation as part of the first stage of the D.I.V.E. model - asking the student to describe. Encourage the AFS student to simply observe, without judgment, describing what they are seeing. Often when encountering new cultures, we are quick to judge and do not take the time to objectively observe. Asking the student to simply and as objectively as possible describe what is being observed without judgment can help make the D.I.V.E. strategy be more effective. We suggest that the Monthly Contact & Learning Reflection happens twice in the first month of the experience only.

Week 1

During your first visit with the student, after introductions and getting to know each other, use the D.I.V.E. model to conduct the “**Community Observation**” activity:

- Take the student to a place where people gather in the community, such as a park, square, commercial street, mall, etc.
- Spend time together with the student observing people and interactions.
- Ask the student to describe what they see, interpreting things such as relationships, communication styles etc.
- Verify from your knowledge of the local culture and help student understand the underlying cultural values and beliefs for certain interactions.
- Then ask the student to evaluate the situation. *How does this interpretation of things make them feel? Do they have negative or positive reactions to it? How can this reaction potentially affect their experience in the host culture? What else do they think they need to learn more about?*

HOST STUDENT AND FAMILY ACTIVITY



Give both the student and host family Monthly Reflection Activities Handout 1 “**Starting Life as a Family**” (in Resources) to do together as soon as possible. Discussing this list of questions about household rules, safety, etc. will help set some realistic expectations for both parties.

Please note: The host families should have received the handout titled “**Starting Life as a Family**” during their pre-arrival orientation.



Please note: If the student changes host families during the exchange, make sure they do this activity again. Then help them reflect afterward about the differences between families.

Week 4

Use the D.I.V.E. model to conduct the “**Mapping My Homes**” activity with the student:

- Ask the student to draw a rough map or blueprint of their homes in their home country and host country. At the same time, draw a blueprint of your own home with the student.
- Ask the student to describe where various daily functions happen back home and in the host home: meals, watching TV, studying, family gathering, etc.
- Once the student describes the differences they have observed, lead a discussion to help move into the interpretation of what goes on at home.
- As the “cultural informant” for the local culture, verify some of the student’s interpretations by describing your own home in comparison to the student’s host home.
- Use this opportunity to look at what differences are “cultural” and what are “personal” and help the student better understand the different levels of influence that culture, personality and human nature have on one’s behaviors.
- Encourage the student to remain curious and observant of the new culture and experiences throughout the exchange.

What is a cultural informant?

A cultural informant is someone who has access to the most internal information related to a culture and is willing to share this information in an unbiased way. (For more information see [Basic Intercultural Terminology for AFS & Friends in the ICL Library at icllibrary.afs.org](#).)



HOST STUDENT AND FAMILY ACTIVITY

Give both the student and the host family the Monthly Reflection Activities Handout 2 “**Cultural and Family Heritage Discussion Guide**” (in Resources) with instructions on the cultural and family heritage shared activity.

Please note: If the student changes host families during the exchange, make sure they do this activity again. Then help them reflect afterward about the differences between families.



LEARNING FOCUS AREA #2

Deepening Skills and Understanding

WHEN

This time period may begin as early as the second month, but will usually start around the third month and may last to the mid-point of the student's experience.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Now that you have developed a solid relationship with the student, you can begin to focus on helping them make more sense of the intercultural experience and develop skills and attitudes needed to adapt to their new environment. Our suggestions for discussion topics focus on deepening the understanding of family, friendships and school issues and how these relate to the intercultural learning elements of the exchange program. You may need to help the student consider how to build friendships. We encourage you to help them take a step back from challenges they may have experienced and to do some critical and creative thinking about the issues. This is also a time to help the student develop flexibility in order to manage possible conflicts, in particular helping them think about how to talk to host families, friends and teachers about daily experiences as well as challenges or problems.



3rd Month (Learning Focus Area #2)

ACTIVITIES FOR THE STUDENT WITH THE SUPPORT VOLUNTEER

Work on conflict resolution strategies for use within the family:

- Ask the student about their usual ways of **dealing with conflict** within their home culture as a starting point in the conversation:
 - *What are the most difficult situations you went through? How did you deal with them?*
 - *What are the coping strategies (methods used to dealing with stressful situations) you have most commonly used to deal with difficult situations in the past?*
- There are multiple topics related to **conflict resolution** that can be discussed, which should also incorporate the D.I.V.E. model. Discuss questions like these:
 - *What differences do you see in the expectations of your host parents versus the expectations of your parents back home? What cultural differences might help you interpret or understand these differences better?*
 - *How can you check to see what is cultural versus what is personal?*
 - *What makes you think your host family is upset? What actions have you taken so far that seemed to upset your host parents? Do you understand why they were upset? What communication issues might be involved? How would your parents at home have responded?*
 - *When did you have a feeling that something didn't go right and you didn't know why? What did you observe? Describe the situation, interpret what happened. How can you verify this? How did you evaluate the situation then? How do you evaluate it now?*
- Most of these questions have a strong connection to cultural values, which you should be ready to discuss and/or introduce in the conversation.



HOST STUDENT AND FAMILY ACTIVITY

Ask both the student and the host family to review the Monthly Reflection Activities Handout 1 “**Starting Life as a Family**” activity (in Resources) they did right after arrival and discuss these questions:

- *Were these conversations useful for discovering family life?*
- *What else have you learned since then about the functioning of the household?*
- *Are there new things we need to ask or explain?*



4th Month (Learning Focus Area #2)

ACTIVITIES FOR THE STUDENT WITH THE SUPPORT VOLUNTEER

Support the student's efforts to build relationships and explore the concept of **friendship** in a new culture:

- Ask the student to reflect on how they are connecting interpersonally:
 - *How are you going about getting new friends here?*
 - *What are the closest relationships you have developed in your host community?*
 - *How do you nurture those relationships?*
 - *What are you doing to try and meet new people?*
- Encourage the student to get to know a new person or make an extra effort to get to know someone better every week and then discuss it in your monthly meeting using some of these questions:
 - *What do you have in common with the new people you have met?*
 - *What was the most interesting thing about that person?*
 - *What are the main personal and cultural differences between you?*
 - *Do you think this person is a "typical" representative of the host culture? In which ways yes, in which ways not?*
- Explore the differences and similarities the student perceives in the concept of friendship:
 - *What are your perceptions about the difference in the meaning of "friend" between your home and your host culture?*
 - *What are the main differences and similarities?*
 - *Does one culture seem to differentiate more between the idea of an "acquaintance" and a "friend"?*
 - *What language is used with your new friends?*



HOST STUDENT AND FAMILY ACTIVITY

Give both the student and host family the Monthly Reflection Activities Handout 4 "**Non-Verbal Communication**" (in Resources) with instructions to do a non-verbal communication activity together.



5th Month (Learning Focus Area #2)

ACTIVITIES FOR THE STUDENT WITH THE SUPPORT VOLUNTEER

Help the student understand and expand their **portfolio of communication styles** (see more in post-arrival orientation). Continue exploring differences in communications styles (such as direct vs. indirect, circular vs. linear, etc.) with the student.

Guide the discussion on communication styles with questions such as these:

- *What does the word “yes” mean in your home culture? What does the word “yes” mean in your host culture? How is this different?*
- *What are common topics of conversation back home? What are common topics of conversation in the host community? Do you notice a difference in what topics are “safe” in the home versus host culture? For example, are there topics that you would not discuss unless you know the person well?*
- *Did you discuss non-verbal communication with your host family last month? What did you learn from it?*

Please note: If the student has not done the activity with the host family, go through the questions with them.



HOST STUDENT AND FAMILY ACTIVITY

Give both the student and host family the Monthly Reflection Activities Handout 5 “**Communication Styles and Time orientation**” (in Resources) with instructions to do an exercise together.



LEARNING FOCUS AREA #3

The Intercultural Self in the World

WHEN

Beginning about halfway through the student's experience and extending up until the last month of the experience.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Ideally, the student is now well adjusted and much more competent with local language skills. While much work has been done in the personal realm in the earlier stages of the program, the discussion topics and activities for this time period are aimed to help the student think more about themselves within their new cultural and the greater global context and create consciousness of what they are learning through the AFS program.

Our goal is that they will begin to identify the values, skills and behaviors they brought with them from the home culture and the newly acquired skills and learning that has happened as a result of their experience in the host culture. This is also a time to help the student begin to further develop a sense of self as a global citizen and how their learning through AFS enriches them.

Involvement in volunteer work, local community service projects or similar activities can provide a relevant and meaningful experience to debrief, helping the student think about and begin to act on issues such as hunger, homelessness, education, the environment, etc. that have both local and global dimensions. Such activities provide a chance to look at how cultures address these issues and help the student learn and formulate their approach to taking action. The orientations taking place during this time also encourage student engagement in activities such as these, either together with local AFS volunteers, fellow AFS students, others in the community or family or even on their own.

It is also important to help the student look at how they are expressing appreciation to the host family, school, etc. for the opportunities provided them.

Finally, some of the activities below ask the student to look back and reflect about how to make the experience moving forward even better.



6th Month (Learning Focus Area #3)

ACTIVITIES FOR THE STUDENT WITH THE SUPPORT VOLUNTEER

Work with the student on “**Showing Emotions**” in a new environment in ways that are culturally appropriate yet authentic.

By this point in the experience, students have already had the chance to notice the differences in the way people show emotions, affection and love for each other.

- As a hands-on reflection activity, refer to the “Cultural Values and Dimensions” chapter in *What Every AFser Should Know about Intercultural Learning 2.0*. Use the tables provided in the chapter to identify where the student’s home and host cultures fall on the different “cultural” continuums to facilitate this discussion. Showing emotions may be linked to different dimensions in one culture—such as indulgence vs. restraint, small vs. large power distance, masculinity vs. femininity and others. Support volunteers must study and understand these different dimensions to adequately explain them to the student and help them think through these concepts. (**Please note:** *What Every AFser Should Know about Intercultural Learning 2.0* is in the ICL Library at iclibrary.afs.org.)

A key element in intercultural learning requires that students understand differences such as those suggested in the “Cultural Values and Dimensions” chapter—and be able to adapt their behavior to the local ways without losing a sense of who they are. Adapting to a different way of expressing emotions is one of the most difficult aspects of intercultural adaptation that can be challenging for many AFS students spending their experience in a different culture.

- Some reflection questions might include:
 - *What are the main differences between your home culture and host culture in terms of expressing love and affection? Why do you think such differences exist?*
 - *Do you feel comfortable with the way others express their emotions to you here? What can you do to feel more comfortable? What are some of the challenges you have faced?*



HOST STUDENT AND FAMILY ACTIVITY

From this point until the final month, ask both the student and host family to discuss these three questions together every month:

- *What was everyone’s highlight of the month?*
- *What was everyone’s main challenge?*
- *How can we support each other with the challenges?*



7th Month (Learning Focus Area #3)

ACTIVITIES FOR THE STUDENT WITH THE SUPPORT VOLUNTEER

Help the student develop as a **global citizen** by encouraging them to volunteer locally:

- Advise the student to engage in a local volunteer or service project. Use this involvement as an opportunity for a structured debriefing discussion, which helps the student learn and think about themselves as a global citizen with multiple value systems. You may also want to join the student in the local community service project.
- When choosing a project or activity, discuss the selection process with the student:
 - *What local issue attracted you to this project?*
 - *What sort of global issues have you observed to be linked to this local project?*
 - *Which one of them caught your attention and concern most?*
 - *In what areas do you think you can better contribute and make a positive difference?*
- These are some of the questions you may want to discuss with the student about their community service experience:
 - *What does the community service experience reveal to you about related values in both the home and host culture?*
 - *Are there multiple perspectives on the issue?*



HOST STUDENT AND FAMILY ACTIVITY

Ask both the student and the host family again to discuss these three questions:

- *What was everyone's highlight of the month?*
- *What was everyone's main challenge?*
- *How can we better support each other through the challenges?*



8th Month (Learning Focus Area #3)

ACTIVITIES FOR THE STUDENT WITH THE SUPPORT VOLUNTEER

Work with the student to **show appreciation** in the host community:

- If we think of culture as an iceberg, showing appreciation can be both above the waterline (as a type of behavior) and below the waterline (when representing a value). Once the student has been in the host country for a number of months, it is good to discuss how appreciation is expressed:
 - *Is the host culture mostly verbal? What are the non-verbal appreciation cues in the host culture?*
 - *How are these the same and how are they different between the home and host cultures?*

Please note: The student should have already learned about the iceberg model of culture in pre-departure communications and/or orientation. If not, please refer to pre-departure orientation Session for information about the iceberg model.

- Discuss the culturally appropriate way of expressing appreciation with the student:
 - *How do people show appreciation in your host culture? Is this different than your home culture?*
 - *How can you express your appreciation for your family, school, friends, AFS volunteers, other people in the community?*

When you discuss showing appreciation, make sure to address the differences between values and behaviors regarding appreciation.

In some cultures, it might be appropriate to express appreciation at a party or gathering. Use this or another culturally appropriate way to help the student actively express appreciation to the host family, friends, teachers or other people who have had a good impact on the student's experience.

- If you are helping the student organize an event, discuss the typical ways to plan and throw a party in the home and host cultures. This is a chance for the student to actively demonstrate cultural learning, in this case about methods of appreciation from home culture as well as in the host culture and also to thank their host community:
 - *What do you think expectations are in terms of time things start/end? Invitations? Food/drinks served? Other ways to show appreciation?*



HOST STUDENT AND FAMILY ACTIVITY

Ask both the student and the host family again to discuss these three questions:

- *What was everyone's highlight of the month?*
- *What was everyone's main challenge?*
- *How can we better support each other through the challenges?*



LEARNING FOCUS AREA #4

Preparing for the Return to the Home Culture

WHEN

This may begin in the last four to six weeks of the student's experience.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

At this point in the experience, students often experience many conflicting emotions. Their excitement about returning home may be tempered by the sorrow of saying good-bye to host family and friends and possibly to aspects of the new culture to which they have adapted.

At around this time, students will attend the end-of-stay orientation where they will review their whole experience, planning for the last few weeks in the host country (including thanking important people during their experience) and reflecting about possible challenges when going back home. These monthly learning reflections are an opportunity to enhance this process and go deeper into the student's individual experience.

This is also the time to begin preparing the student to return to their home culture. Ideally, these Monthly Contacts & Learning Reflections will help them to think about the whole AFS experience deeply and identify what they have gained and learned during their sojourn. At the same time, you can help the students examine the skills and tools they have developed and used, and think about how to use these skills and tools as they return home, especially but not only for their initial re-adjustment.

Encourage the student to get involved with AFS as an alumnus or returnee after their return home, to join a support network of people who have had similar experiences. They can do this by becoming an AFS volunteer.

Finally, be sure to point out that what is learned through the AFS exchange experience is also the beginning of a lifelong learning adventure and that the same skills and tools that helped them first adjust to the host culture will help them re-adjust to the home culture. These can and should also be applied outside of the AFS context in the student's everyday personal, academic and professional life.



9th Month (Learning Focus Area #4)

ACTIVITIES FOR THE SUPPORT VOLUNTEER AND STUDENT

Help the student prepare to **report back** and articulate or share in meaningful terms the growth they have experienced. Discuss with the student about what they would tell someone from the home culture about the host culture:

- *What were the main challenges you faced in adapting to the host culture?*
- *What were some of the most surprising cultural differences you discovered?*
- *What are the differences in values? In communication styles? In the sense of time?*
- *What were the diverse examples of people you have met? To what extent did they conform or contradict your general opinion about the host culture?*
- *What suggestions would you give to someone from your home culture entering the host culture for the first time?*
- *What advice do you have for future AFSers or local host families and schools?*
- *Based on how you understand the AFS experience, who in this community do you think would be a good host family? Why?*

HOST STUDENT AND FAMILY ACTIVITY



Ask both the student and the host family again to discuss these three questions:

- *What was everyone's highlight of the month?*
- *What was everyone's main challenge?*
- *How can we better support each other through the challenges?*



10th Month (Learning Focus Area #4)

ACTIVITIES FOR THE SUPPORT VOLUNTEER AND STUDENT

Reflecting on the New Self

- By now, many students will have identified aspects of the new culture that may be particularly satisfying to them. They may have also identified aspects of the host family that they enjoyed or may not exist at home. These are important points of discussion:
 - *What differences in yourself are important for you to take home? How will your family and friends perceive those differences? How will those differences be perceived in general in the home culture?*
 - *What are things you have learned which may help you in your adjustment back home?*
 - *What resources do you have back home? How might involvement with AFS in your home country help you?*
- Help students identify personal strengths and weaknesses during the experience:
 - *How did you surprise yourself?*
 - *What new skills did you discover?*
 - *What personal areas do you need to keep working on when you go back home? How do you plan to do that?*

HOST STUDENT AND FAMILY ACTIVITY



Ask both the student and the host family to discuss these final reflection questions:

- *What was the highlight of our time together? Does anyone remember the funniest story?*
- *What were the main challenges?*
- *What did we learn during this time together?*
- *What did you do that made you proud? (Each person must answer.)*
- *What did you do that you wish you did differently? (Each person must answer.)*