



SUPPORT MOVES: TIPS FOR MANAGING CONVERSATIONS WITH HOST FAMILIES

Challenges in a relationship between the student and host family that result in support moves are not always easy to address, mostly due to high emotions and often very different perspectives on the challenges at hand. Furthermore, by the time the move is decided upon the relationship is often deteriorated, which leaves little room for volunteers to facilitate a constructive conversation between the host family and the student. The way in which we talk to host families about their student moving also affects the family's interest in staying involved with AFS and hosting in the future.

TIPS FOR DISCUSSING STUDENT MOVES WITH A HOST FAMILY*

(*Each situation is different. Below suggestions may not apply to every support situation.)

- Whenever possible suggest to meet in person (avoid texting).
- If your volunteer Team decided to move the student, and obtained agreement and approval from AFS support staff, discuss with the team's support leadership who will inform the host family and be mindful of informing the host family as soon as possible.
- Coordinate a timeline of informing all parties with AFS support staff to mitigate the possibility of the host family and/or student learning about the move from the natural parents.
- Discuss a timeline for the move. If according to AFS guidelines the move is not urgent, ask the host family to allow the Team some time to identify a replacement host family. *Have a pre-screened support family ready to take the student and/or start looking for a replacement family at the earliest sign of a possible move.*
- If the move is due to inappropriate host family behavior, support leadership will discuss with support staff what volunteers can disclose to the host family before and during the move, and who the host family can contact for further information.

What do I say?



What do I do?

- Assure the host family that AFS is following its guidelines and is not passing judgment on them. (This is especially important to emphasize when the move is due to safety and/or compliance concerns.)
- If the host family requested the move, discuss with them how they would like the student to be informed and by whom (host family, volunteers, in a joint meeting, etc.).
- Assure the host family that AFS will continue to address any challenges with the student after the move and take appropriate support steps. (This might be helpful in cases where the host family is upset that the student got “an easy out” by being moved.)
- If the move cannot take place right away, use a support tool in order to improve the remainder of the placement for the host family and the student and increase confidence in the AFS support efforts.
- Instruct students who move to speak only positively about their host family experience and make the host family aware of this advice. If the students are questioned by others about the move, advise them to simply say *“Things did not work out.”*
- If you are concerned about the host family behavior during the pickup, go in pairs, with another volunteer.

COLLABORATIVE

NON-JUDGMENTAL

SUPPORTIVE

APPROACHES

WHAT IF THE
HOST FAMILY
REQUESTS
AFS TO
RETURN THE
STUDENT
HOME
IMMEDIATELY

Advise the host family that AFS staff is taking appropriate support steps and will make decisions accordingly.

If you receive any ultimatums, demands, or push-backs from the host family, let your team's support leadership and AFS support staff know.

Sometimes the difficult conversation is about the student violating major AFS rules or behaving in an unacceptable way, which decidedly leads to an Early Return. In this case:

Ask the host family if they are willing to keep the student until departure while clearly explaining the general timeline and logistics of the ER process, which may take several days.

Advise the host family that the volunteers may have a counseling session with the student to address the inappropriate behavior. These sessions are to help the student learn from their experience.

Assure the host family that AFS is taking their concerns very seriously and will continue to enforce compliance with AFS rules and expectations for the remainder of the student's program.

VERY HIGH NEGATIVE EMOTIONS OFTEN PREVENT THE HOST PARENTS (AND STUDENTS) FROM FEELING ABLE TO MOVE FORWARD CONSTRUCTIVELY.

- Whether you are having a one-on-one conversation with the student or host parent, or facilitating a meeting between them, give all parties an opportunity to “vent” and to be heard. Providing structure, such as turn-taking or individual one-on-one conversations can oftentimes help one person vent while preventing the other from feeling overheard or not listened to.
- Validate one’s feelings, but try to move the conversation toward a constructive resolution- focus on next steps. Listen for human interests, and talk to students and families about what is most important for them now, and moving forward.
- If emotions are high and the host parents are having difficulty having a constructive conversation ask them to take some time for themselves and to talk/meet again at a later time.



HELPFUL TALKING POINTS

- ❖ It's been decided to give the student a break.
- ❖ It's been assessed that it will be the best for your family and the student if the student moves at least temporarily.
- ❖ If the host family asks specifically *Who* made the decision about the move, explain that AFS Support Team decided that this move is in the best interest of the student and host family.
- ❖ We are very sorry about the concerns you have been experiencing.
- ❖ AFS feels moving the student may be the best course of action.
- ❖ Is there anything you want AFS to know?
- ❖ What is your expectation from AFS moving forward?
- ❖ What do you see a resolution to be?

HELPFUL LANGUAGE TIPS

- ❖ Use passive language whenever appropriate
- ❖ Use non-judgmental and unbiased language
- ❖ Be concise and avoid arguing

