



AYUSA PROGRAM HANDBOOK 2026-2027



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Welcome to the Ayusa Program

Dear Ayusa Student, Host Family, and High School Partners & Representatives,

Ayusa International is proud to be the sponsor of your program. We believe that high school exchange gives students an excellent opportunity for personal growth and, in a larger context, plays an important role in connecting people across cultures worldwide.

As a student, you are leaving your familiar environment to embark on one of the most exciting experiences of your life. You will get to know a different culture, make new friends, become fluent in a new language, overcome a number of challenges, and—we hope—have a lot of fun along the way. At the end of the program, you will have learned not only a lot about life in the United States but also about yourself. You will return home with more confidence in your abilities.

As a host family, you are graciously welcoming young people from another country into your home and inviting them to become members of your family. Besides providing a wonderful opportunity for your student, this experience will give you a chance to learn about another culture and see your own culture and family life from a different perspective.

As American high school teachers, counselors, and administrators, when you generously open your doors to an international exchange student, you also open the doors to an exchange of friendship and ideas between American youth and their international peers. You are providing an opportunity for American students to learn about the wider world, gain awareness of cultural differences, and develop a broader, more accepting view of others. You are also giving exchange students a chance to appreciate American society and its democratic principles. Your contribution fosters a more enlightened generation of young citizens in an increasingly global world.

At Ayusa, we believe that high school exchange is a transformative experience for everybody involved, a chance to build meaningful connections that often last well beyond the duration of the program. We are committed to supporting all of you—Ayusa students, host families, and schools—as best we can so that your experiences with the program are successful and meaningful.

The purpose of this manual is to address common questions and challenges to help all of you fully realize the benefits of the program. It also reviews the program rules and expectations. Please take some time to become familiar with the content to help prepare yourself for your participation in the program. Feel free to contact your Community Representative if you have any questions.

Again, the Ayusa Team welcomes you to the program, and we look forward to talking with you and hearing about your cross-cultural experiences!

Sincerely,
The Ayusa Team

1.

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Ayusa Headquarters

Telephone

General Inquiries: +1.888.552.9872
Emergency: +1.800.727.4540, PRESS 1
(toll free)

Fax

+1.415.873.1416

Mail

Ayusa International
455 Market Street, Suite 1700
San Francisco, CA 94105

Student Support E-mail Address

studentsupport@ayusa.org
studentinsurance@ayusa.org

Website

www.ayusa.org

Community Representative

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Regional Support Specialist

for all student-related issues/support

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Regional Manager

for all placement/rematch-related issues

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

U.S. Department of State

Mail

United States Department of State
Office of Exchange Coordination and
Designation
ECA/EC/PS - SA-44, Room 734
301 4th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20547

Telephone

+1.866.283.9090

Fax

+1.202.203.5087

E-mail

jvisas@state.gov

Website

www.state.gov

2.

AYUSA SUPPORT

The Ayusa network in the U.S. has three levels: community representatives, regional offices, and the San Francisco headquarters staff. Each of these levels has a clearly defined role in facilitating the success of the Ayusa program, and they all offer a variety of resources and support services to our students, host families and schools.

Community Representatives

Each student is assigned a Community Representative who serves as their main contact regarding most aspects of the program. In addition to matching students with host families, the Community Representative is responsible for conducting orientations, assisting with high school enrollment, and providing support and guidance to students, host families, and schools, as needed. Community Representatives maintain close communication with students and host families, as well as school officials. They contact students and host families separately once a month, either in person, via email, or by phone. Schools are contacted at a minimum of every 6 to 8 weeks. Community Representatives are also required to document student patterns of adjustment, outstanding accomplishments, and areas of concern. **Students and host families are expected to promptly reply to communication requests from Ayusa to ensure Department of State compliance is maintained. This includes a timely response to Monthly Contact questions.**



Tips for Success

Students, host families, and schools are always welcome to contact their Community Representative for information or advice. The Community Representatives are able to offer support in a friendly and professional manner and can help prevent minor issues from snowballing into major problems—especially if they have the opportunity to get involved at an early stage.

Regional Offices

Ayusa maintains several regional offices throughout the U.S., each headed by a full-time Regional Manager (RM) and supported by a Regional Support Specialist (RSS). The RM and RSS lead a team of Community Representatives. The Community Representatives are the main and first point of contact for students, host families, and schools.

The Regional Manager (RM) and Regional Support Specialist (RSS) provide ongoing support to students, host families, and Community Representatives and may become involved at any point when additional guidance, clarification, or higher-level intervention is needed—not only in emergencies or escalated situations. While Community Representatives remain the primary point of contact for day-to-day support, the RM and RSS work closely with them to assist with student adjustment, host family concerns, school issues, and other matters throughout the program year. The RM and RSS are in direct communication with Ayusa’s overseas partners and may request information or support from students’ natural parents through the overseas office. Students, host families, and schools should first contact the Community Representative for routine questions or concerns; however, the RM or RSS may be contacted for additional support when advised by the CR, when further assistance is required, or if the Community Representative is unavailable for a 24-hour period.

Headquarters

Ayusa headquarters is located in San Francisco, California. The headquarters staff offers support to the field (student, host family, RM, RSS, Community Representative) and oversees program operations, including training and direction of the regional offices, managing escalated student issues, and closely managing emergencies.

In the event of a crisis involving a student’s well-being or safety, we ask that students, host families, and schools call the 24-hour toll-free emergency number of the San Francisco office: +1.800.727.4540, PRESS 1. (For more detailed information on handling emergencies, please refer to the section on Ayusa’s Emergency Procedures.)

3.

PROGRAM SUPPORT

The purpose of rules and policies is to support participants' efforts to successfully navigate through the program. The following section of this handbook outlines the rules and policies that are most relevant to Ayusa participants.

Ayusa Rules

As part of the Ayusa program application process, students and their natural parents sign an agreement to abide by Ayusa's program rules. These rules are designed to protect Ayusa students, host families and schools, and to provide the general framework for a successful program experience.

Ayusa expects our students to abide by the program rules. In cases where a rule is broken, depending on the severity of the infraction, Community Representatives will provide guidance as the student works to change the behavior in question. However, even the strongest support system is only effective if students display the maturity and willingness to correct their mistakes. If problems cannot be resolved within a reasonable amount of time, Ayusa will take disciplinary action, following an established procedure (refer to the section on "Disciplinary Procedures").

The Ayusa Rules are summarized as follows:

Rule 1: Host Family Rules & Expectations

Students must obey host family rules and follow along with host family expectations. This includes, but is not limited to, rules regarding curfew, household chores, dating, friends, appropriate attire, and computer and phone privileges (including personal laptops and cell phones). Students are responsible for covering the cost of any cell phone and all long-distance and international telephone calls as they incur them. **For safety reasons, students are required to obtain a cell phone with a US domestic phone number and maintain service on the cell phone once it is activated.** Students are not to be added to host family cell phone plans. Students may not have guests in the host family's home without their host family's consent and supervision.

Internet Use: Students must not submit, publish, display, or retrieve/download any inappropriate material, including material that is negative about other individuals, abusive, obscene, profane, gang-related, sexually related, racially offensive, or illegal. Students must not transmit any data/material, threatening or obscene materials, or anarchist or terrorist information. Students should refrain from sharing personal contact information such as email, address, or phone number on any social media platforms including online dating applications. Students should only publish photos of their host family or host home with the permission of their host family.

Refer to **Section 6** of Ayusa Program Handbook for additional information.

Rule 2: Academic Life

Ayusa is an academic program. Students are responsible for attending school and achieving a C or better grade in every class. Students must follow all academic and behavioral requirements, such as academic honesty/plagiarism, acceptable computer use, sexual harassment, bullying, attendance, and tardiness, as defined by their high school and/or Ayusa (refer to the section on "Appropriate Conduct" on pages 29-30). Excessive tardies/absences are not permitted. Violations of school rules may result in disciplinary action by Ayusa, regardless of whether the school imposes its own disciplinary measures. If the school administration determines that a student is no longer welcome to attend school due to behavioral or academic problems, the student may be dismissed from the Ayusa program. If any of the student's grades drop below a C, the student may be required to drop out of extracurricular sports/activities. Students whose grades drop below a C will be reviewed for disciplinary processes.

Ayusa does not in any way guarantee that students may enroll in twelfth-grade classes, graduate, or receive a diploma from a U.S. high school. Ayusa does not guarantee a student will be able to participate in specific extracurricular sports or activities, however, we highly encourage students to become engaged at their school to enrich their program experience. Students must accept and obey their school's policies.

Refer to **Section 7** of Ayusa Program Handbook for additional information.

Rule 3: Local, State and National Laws

Students are subject to the authority and laws of their host country and must obey all federal, state, and local laws and regulations. Students must use their best judgment and learn these laws. Ignorance of the law is not considered a legal defense for breaking it. Exchange students are not exempt from legal prosecution. Participants agree to hold Ayusa blameless for any or all consequences that may result from a student breaking local, state, or federal laws. Students are advised to leave a situation where a law is being broken (this may include, but is not limited to underage drinking, smoking, or drug use). Breaking the law is grounds for dismissal from the Ayusa program.

Rule 4: Drugs, Drinking and Smoking

The use or possession of non-prescription drugs or controlled substances is illegal. Students may only take medications prescribed by their doctor or take medicines commercially available in the host country. Some medications that are commercially available in other countries require a doctor's prescription in the United States. Students requiring these prescribed medications should bring documentation in English from the doctor in their home country, explaining why the medication is required and a prescription from their doctor with the name and dosage clearly printed on it.

Use and/or possession of illegal drugs is grounds for immediate dismissal from the Ayusa program. This includes marijuana, even if the host state has made it legal (the legal age of consumption is 21). Exchange students arrested for drug use or possession face the same penalties as citizens of the United States, including mandatory fines or prison terms, and will be immediately dismissed from the Ayusa program.

Students may not drink alcoholic beverages inside or outside of the host family home, nor may they purchase or be in possession of alcoholic beverages, including beer and wine. Host families must not offer students alcoholic beverages, even on special occasions. Drinking or purchasing alcoholic beverages while on program is grounds for immediate dismissal from the program and is a violation of federal law. The minimum drinking age in the United States is 21 years. Arrest and expensive fines may result from violating this law.

Students are not allowed to possess or use nicotine, cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, marijuana, Juuls, e-cigarettes, vaping, etc. during the program, regardless of age, and will face Ayusa disciplinary procedures if they violate this rule. Because it is against the law in the U.S., students who violate the rule regarding use or possession of tobacco products may be subject to immediate probation or dismissal. It is important for students to decline offers of drugs, alcohol, and smoking products while on program, regardless of who it is that offers the student the item.

Ayusa staff may determine that a drug test is necessary while a student is on program. Before administering the drug test, the Overseas Partner (OSP) must be notified and the natural parent must agree. Notification to the OSP will include the reasons for the test. If the student is 18 or older, the student can provide their own consent for testing instead of the natural parent. The OSP will receive notification in these situations as well. Refusal to take a drug test, falsification of results, or a positive result on the drug test may be grounds for dismissal from the program. Cost of the drug test is the responsibility of the natural parent.

Rule 5: Driving and Extreme Activities

Students may not drive motor vehicles while on program. This includes participating in the driving portion of Driver's Education. Students also may not drive four-wheelers, snowmobiles, jet skis, tractors, riding lawn mowers, go-karts, or any other motorized vehicle. Students are not allowed to be passengers on motorcycles, motorbikes, or scooters. They are not allowed to purchase or own any motor vehicle. Violation of this rule is grounds for dismissal from the Ayusa program.

Extreme sports/activities—such as but not limited to: skydiving, bungee jumping, wingsuit flying, hang gliding, flying in a non-commercial plane or glider, base jumping, cliff diving—are deemed too dangerous, and students are not allowed to participate in these activities for safety reasons. This also applies to hunting, shooting, and any other activity involving a gun or similar weapon. The only aircraft that students are allowed to ride or fly in are major carriers. The only exception is for students who are placed in remote areas such as Alaska, where aircraft is the only method of access.

Ayusa is responsible for the safety of our students while on program, and therefore, we cannot allow students to participate in any activity where there is an increased risk for severe injury or death. Insurance will not cover injuries resulting from participation in extreme sports/activities. Participants understand that participation in sports or activities as described above will result in progressive disciplinary action (warning letter, probation, or potential dismissal). Ayusa reserves the right to make decisions in the interest of the students' safety and security, and such decisions are considered final.

Refer to **Section 8** of Ayusa Program Handbook for additional information.

Rule 6: Life-Changing Events

Ayusa students may not initiate any “life-changing” decisions, events, or actions while on program. Violation of this rule may be grounds for dismissal from the Ayusa program. Life-changing events include, but are not limited to:

- *Changing Religion:* Students may explore the tenets of any religion but are not allowed to formally change their religious affiliation. Host families should understand that students are not required to attend any religious services. However, in the spirit of learning about their host family’s values and lifestyle, Ayusa encourages students to attend religious services or activities if they are an integral part of the family’s life. If students are uncomfortable with the religious content of services or activities, they are not required to participate.
- *Pregnancy and Marriage:* Students are expected to refrain from sexual activity while on the Ayusa program and are not permitted to get married. Pregnancy will require a student to immediately return to their home country for care.
- *Permanent Physical Alterations:* Students may not alter their body (tattoos, body piercings, etc.) in any way while on program, even if they have permission from their natural parents and regardless of age.
- *Dietary Changes:* Students should refrain from making any dietary changes while on program, without first discussing it with their host family and Ayusa Representative. Special diets such as vegetarian or vegan require extensive education and monitoring to ensure that nutritional needs are met and to avoid serious physical ailments that could develop due to a lack of proper diet. Not all host families can accommodate a special diet.

Rule 7: Serious Medical or Mental Health Issues

Ayusa and volunteer host families are not in a position to adequately support students who suffer from serious and potentially life-threatening medical or mental health conditions that require ongoing treatment. These conditions include but are not limited to cancer, heart disease, serious allergies, clinical depression, eating disorders, and self-injurious or suicidal behaviors.

Students are required to disclose pre-existing serious and potentially life-threatening conditions at the time of application, and failure to do so is grounds for dismissal from the Ayusa program. For any serious medical or mental health condition that occurs on program without prior symptoms, Ayusa will evaluate on a case-by-case basis whether a student will remain on program. This may include an evaluation by a medical or mental health professional.

If a student discloses that they are having suicidal thoughts or self-injurious behaviors (or impulses) while on program, they may be immediately referred to a mental health professional for evaluation. In some areas where there are limited mental health facilities or providers, the evaluation may be done by Emergency Room staff at a nearby hospital. Referral to a mental health professional may also be required if a student’s behavior indicates that they may be at risk. If results of an evaluation indicate that the student or others are at risk, or the student requires ongoing treatment, the student will be withdrawn from program so they can continue treatment at home, unless otherwise indicated.

Rule 8: Travel

For safety and security reasons, Ayusa needs to always know the whereabouts of students. Students are expected to comply with the following rules and conditions regarding any travel.

The Request for Student Travel Form may be requested from your Community Representative or using the QR code at the end of the handbook.

Flights and accommodations should not be purchased prior to obtaining approval for travel. Ayusa is not financially responsible for any trips that must be canceled or rescheduled due to lack of prior written travel permission or cancellation of permission due to student receiving disciplinary action after permission is granted.

The Ayusa program starts when students arrive in the U.S. Therefore, upon arrival in the U.S., students must travel directly to their host communities and families. No personal travels are permitted prior to host community arrival including natural parents travelling to the U.S. with their student. If a sport or other organized school activity requires early arrival, then the student may be allowed to arrive early. Otherwise, the student should arrive no more than ten calendar days before school starts. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis with written approval from the RM, RSS, and host family.

- Natural parent approval is required for any travel that involves leaving the U.S. territory, via signature on the Request for Student Travel Form.

- All student travel must occur after January 15th and should be limited to weekends and school vacation periods. Exceptions may be made for trips with the host family or school, as well as Ayusa-sponsored trips, including Belo Tours. Ayusa rules apply on all student travel. **For students to be permitted to miss school in the context of travel, their school and Ayusa must grant approval.**

- Students may not travel independently. To travel, a student must be accompanied by a responsible adult (25 years or older) that is approved by Ayusa. Exceptions may apply for flights to and from Ayusa-sponsored events or visits to natural family or close family friends who reside in the U.S. When traveling by air, students must be escorted to the airport security checkpoint at their departure airport and they must be met outside security at their destination by a responsible adult (25 years or older).

- Students may not visit their home country during the program.

- Educational travel or sightseeing tours that are not with the host family or sponsored by the school or Ayusa must be booked through Belo Tours, a pre-authorized Ayusa partner tour company. For questions related to Belo travel, please contact Belo at <https://www.belousa.com/students/>.

• In order to travel, a student's behavior must indicate that they can be trusted to conduct themselves in a responsible, safe and mature manner while traveling. Therefore, students on probation may not be granted permission to travel for the duration of their program, unless they are accompanying their host family. Travel permission may be granted at the discretion of the Regional Support Specialist. In regard to host families traveling without their students present, please refer to the section on "Leaving Students Home Alone" (page 20) for guidance on what Ayusa does or does not allow.

• Ayusa recognizes that in many other cultures, public transportation is commonly used, even by the teenage population. However, in some U.S. communities, it may put the student at risk of harm and should be avoided. Therefore, we ask that students refrain from utilizing public transportation such as buses, taxis, Lyft/Uber, subways, metro train services, shuttle services, or similar modes of transportation, without first speaking with your Community Representative or your Regional Support Specialist. If granted an exception to use public transportation, it must be used in the way in which it was approved.

Please note: The Ayusa Travel Policy goes into effect the moment a student enters the United States and remains so until his/her departure.

When traveling with the host family:

Trips involving three nights or less away from the host community do not require a travel form.

- Students are responsible for informing their Community Representative of any travel in advance, including travel with host families for three nights or less, and they must provide contact information where they can be reached while traveling.
- Students are encouraged to keep their natural parents apprised of their whereabouts if they leave their host community.

Trips involving more than three overnight stays away from the host community require a travel form to be completed PRIOR to booking travel.

- Students must complete and submit a Request for Student Travel Form to their Community Representative at least two weeks prior to traveling to obtain travel approval from Ayusa.

When traveling without the host family outside of the community (regardless of the duration):

- Students must complete a Request for Student Travel Form to obtain travel approval from Ayusa at least two weeks prior to travel. The student's natural parents must also approve of the travel.
- A background check will need to be completed on any person (18 years or older) who has not been properly vetted, and who will be supervising the student during the trip. See your Community Representative for assistance.

Refer to **Section 10** of Ayusa Program Handbook for additional information.

Rule 9: Request for Natural Family/Family Friend Visit to Host Community

Students are strongly encouraged to postpone any visits from their natural parents until after the student completes the program to prevent the visit from having a negative impact on the student's program success. All visits from the NF/FF to the U.S. must occur in the host community. Travel with the natural family and/or family friends (NF/FF) out of the host community will not be allowed until program end, at which time a Program Release Form must be completed instead of a Request for Natural Family/Family Friend Visit to Host Community Form. *Unapproved Natural Family/Family Friend Visits to the host community that occur without Ayusa approval may result in student discipline. The Request for Natural Family/Family Friend Visit to Host Community Form may be requested from your Community Representative or using the QR code at the end of the handbook.* The following rules apply:

- **Only one visit from NF/FF will be allowed during the student's program.**
- The Request for Natural Family/Family Friend Visit to Host Community Form must be completed, submitted, and returned to the student at least **30 days in advance of the visit.**
- All visits must occur after January 15th. Semester students do not qualify for this privilege due to the time constraints of their program.
- This policy applies to natural family and family friends (NF/FF) who plan to visit the U.S. Student visits to NF/FF living in the U.S requires the completion of a Request for Student Travel Form which are approved on a case by case basis. Visits to and from other high school exchange students outside of the exchange community are not allowed unless organized by Ayusa staff. **This includes siblings who are on program at the same time. Unaccompanied NF/FF must be over the age of 18.**
- Travel must not be booked until permission is granted in writing by the Regional Support Specialist. Doing so could result in loss of funds by the natural parents if permission is denied for any reason. Ayusa is not financially responsible for any trips that must be canceled or rescheduled due to a lack of written approval or cancellation of permission due to student receiving disciplinary action after permission is granted.
- All parties must agree to the visit, including the host family, natural parents, overseas partner, Community Representative, and Regional Support Specialist by signing the Request for Natural Family/Family Friend Visit to Host Community Form.
- If it is determined for any reason that the visit will be detrimental (negative) to the student's success in the program, the visit will be denied. If the student is placed on probation, the visit may be denied or canceled.
- Visits should be brief (1-4 days) and focused on meeting the host family and understanding the student's experience in the program.
- The host family is not expected to host the visitor(s), nor are they expected to provide transportation and/or entertainment during the visit.
- The student may not spend the night away from the host family home during the visit.
- The student must continue to follow all host family and Ayusa rules during the visit and is expected to maintain school attendance and participation, including completion of homework during the visit.



Student Tips for Success

Following Ayusa rules will not only prepare you for a positive experience on the program, but will also have a far-reaching effect. Remember, during your time in the U.S., you are not only representing yourself—you are also representing your country. For many Americans you meet during your stay in the U.S., you might be the only person from your country that they will encounter. The impression you make directly reflects on your culture. You are truly an ambassador for your home country, and with this role comes much responsibility. You have been selected for this program because we believe that you can handle this responsibility, and we expect you to take it very seriously.

Rule 10: Returning Home / Program Release

The Ayusa program follows the U.S. academic calendar. Students are expected to leave their host communities and return to their home countries no later than two weeks after the program end date, which is the last day of school.

While we understand that students may accumulate additional belongings during their exchange program, we recommend traveling with no more than two suitcases due to logistical considerations and potential costs. Bringing more than two suitcases may result in additional airline baggage fees, the need to downsize or donate items, or transportation challenges when getting to the airport.

In order for a student to remain in the U.S. more than two weeks after school is out, a completed Program Release form must be submitted and approved by the Regional Support Specialist. The Program Release Form may be requested from your Community Representative or using the QR code at the end of the handbook. **If a student departs from the host community with their parents, he/she is not permitted to return to the host community prior to departing for his/her home country.** YES students who travel after school ends but before their required trip to Washington, DC should complete a Travel Request Form instead.

After the program release date, if a student is released to their natural parents, Ayusa and the host family are no longer responsible for the student, and all benefits and services associated with the program will no longer be available. If the student is remaining on program release with the host family, the host family assumes responsibility for the student and Ayusa is no longer responsible for the student, and all benefits and services associated with the program will no longer be available.

Students must complete their program to be eligible for program release. Students who have been dismissed or withdrawn from the program must immediately return to their home countries.

The following requirements apply for program release:

- The student will be in the care and supervision of an adult over the age of 25 who has been approved by Ayusa for the duration of the stay in the U.S.
- The student's natural parents/guardians assume full responsibility for any expenses related to the student's prolonged stay in the U.S., including fees for accommodations, travel, and flight changes.
- During the program release period, the student will uphold all J-1 visa rules and regulations set forth by the U.S. Department of State.
 - The student or natural parents must extend the student medical insurance coverage per J1 Visa rules for the duration of the student's stay in the U.S.

Refer to **Section 11** of Ayusa Program Handbook for additional information.

Voluntary Early Withdrawal from Program

When a student indicates a desire to withdraw from the program, the following process will occur:

- A support call will be set up with the Regional Support Specialist or other appropriate Ayusa staff member.
- The overseas partner will be contacted by Ayusa.
- If after the support call the student continues to express their desire to withdraw from the program, they will be asked to submit their request to withdraw in writing via text or email.
- Ayusa will request the overseas partner to make arrangements for the student to return to their home country. It has been Ayusa's experience that once a student indicates they want to withdraw, either the student starts to disengage and/or the host family requests that the student be removed from their home. As a result, the student should return home no more than one week after the receipt of the written request by Ayusa.
- If there have not been any academic or disciplinary issues and the host family agrees, approval for more than one week may be granted. Students should continue attending school for the time they are in the host community.
- Students must depart their host community and return to their home country. Students may not remain in the U.S. for personal travel.

Any violation of the Ayusa program release policy and expectations may impact a student's permanent immigration record and future opportunities to enter the U.S.

Rule 11: Commitment to Cultural Adaptation

Ayusa understands that for some students this is their first time away from home, and therefore contact with home may be frequent. However, in Ayusa’s experience, consistent contact, including social media contact, with home makes it extremely difficult for students to fully engage in their program experience. If a student’s focus remains on their home country, it becomes harder for them to fully engage with the people around them who can offer immediate support. Excessive communication with home also tends to increase feelings of homesickness. While we understand that students will naturally send brief texts or interact on social media from time to time, substantial communication—such as phone calls, video calls, or long conversations—should be limited to once per week. This helps students stay present, build connections in their host community, and settle into their new environment.

If a student has concerns or problems, they should immediately contact their Community Representative or other Ayusa staff. Students should work with both their natural family and host family to designate a weekly time for a scheduled call. Students must limit communication with family, friends, and others in their home country to times that do not interfere with school, sleep, or host family engagement. Ayusa recognizes that the appropriate amount and timing of communication may vary based on the host family, the student, and the time of year.

Students will limit the amount of time spent in their room or using electronic devices so they can further develop the relationship with their host family. Students are expected to engage in activities with their host family both at home and within the community. They are encouraged to try new foods as a sign of respect, participate in new activities, and actively connect with their host family throughout the exchange experience. Students who display failure to engage or adapt are subject to Ayusa’s disciplinary process.

Students are expected to abide by the Ayusa program rules. Violation of any rule may be grounds for dismissal from the program. Ayusa evaluates each situation on a case-by-case basis prior to making a decision on whether to dismiss a student from program. Ayusa may dismiss a student at any time during the course of the program.

————— NOTES —————

Non-disciplinary Interventions

Ayusa has tools in place to address concerns and offer guidance. These may be issued individually, or in conjunction with disciplinary steps, to assist the student and host family in making the most of their program. All non-disciplinary steps are shared with the host family, Community Representative, and overseas partner who will communicate with the natural parents.

Support Call

This is the most common non-disciplinary step and is usually handled by either the Community Representative or the Regional Support Specialist. It consists of a conversation with the student to offer verbal guidance and feedback to the student, as well as suggested actions to improve a situation. It may be followed up with an email to confirm any direction given.

Mediation

Community Representatives conduct a mediation in certain situations where concerns arise about behaviors/expectations between the student and host family. This is a time for both sides to safely voice their concerns and work together to develop a plan to move forward. Ayusa recommends that all family members are present for the mediation so that everyone has a voice and is aware of agreed-upon plans to work towards having a successful program. It is always best to address these issues when they first arise before feelings have an opportunity to grow worse, and while the situation is still manageable. Please assist Community Representatives in providing written statements, and/or participating in conversations beforehand to ensure that all relative issues are addressed and resolved during the mediation.

Guidance Letter

This is a letter that addresses behavioral concerns that, if not changed, could lead to a disciplinary response. The letter offers guidance, alternative behaviors, suggestions for action, and outlines expectations. The guidance letter is issued to the student by the Regional Support Specialist.

Disciplinary Procedures

Ayusa has a set of formal disciplinary procedures in place to address the breaking of Ayusa rules, behavioral problems, or inadequate academic performance. Disciplinary steps reinforce program boundaries and expectations, provide guidance, and hold students accountable for their behavior. Ayusa has a 3-step system in place that provides several chances for a student to make amends for mistakes and move forward in a positive manner. *Any disciplinary action issued will remain in effect for the duration of the program year.*

Step 1: Disciplinary Warning Letter

If a student displays behavior that interferes with a positive program experience for him/her and the host family or is not making adequate efforts to keep up academically, a formal disciplinary warning letter may be issued. This step is preceded by support conversations with a Community Representative and/or the Regional Support Specialist. The purpose of the disciplinary warning letter is to provide feedback and guidance. It includes a description of the issue and an outline of the specific behavioral or academic adjustments the student is expected to make in order to improve. The letter also outlines consequences in case no effort is made to change, which would be probation. The Regional Support Specialist issues and sends disciplinary warning letters to students via email, who will be asked to reply and confirm that they have read and understood the content and agree to the terms. The Community Representative will follow up with a conversation with the student. A copy of the letter will be shared with the host family, Community Representative, and the overseas partner, who will inform the natural parents.

Step 2: Probation

If a student does not fulfill the terms outlined in the disciplinary warning letter, s/he will be placed on probation. Probation may also be issued in lieu of a disciplinary warning letter for more serious violations of Ayusa program rules and/or the U.S., state, or local laws. Probation is a more serious step that includes a restriction on independent travel. Probation is considered to be a final trial period to determine whether a student is willing to make the behavioral or academic changes necessary to remain on program. If the student fails to make the necessary changes, the likely consequence is dismissal from the program. Probation letters are issued by the Regional Support Specialist and emailed to the student, who will be required to confirm receipt. A copy of the letter will be shared with the host family, Community Representative, and the overseas partner, who will inform the natural parents.

Follow-up conversations with the Community Representative and the Regional Support Specialist will serve to help the student understand the seriousness of the situation and provide guidance and support. Privileges, including travel, may be limited or prohibited for any student placed on probation at the discretion of the Regional Support Specialist.

Step 3: Dismissal

Dismissal occurs when Ayusa decides that a student's behavior or academic performance is not acceptable or sufficient to allow for program completion. The decision to dismiss a student resides with the Ayusa management team at headquarters. Ayusa regards dismissal as a last resort, and this step is preceded by a thorough investigation. Prior to the dismissal, extensive efforts will have been made to support students and give them a fair opportunity to remain on program. Once a student is in the process of being dismissed from the program, Ayusa will formally notify the U.S. Department of State that the student's program has ended early. After being dismissed, students are required to immediately return to their home country. Remaining in the U.S. would be illegal at this point and might affect their ability to get a visa to return to the U.S. in the future.

In some cases, a student may be immediately put on probation or dismissed from the program without the procedures outlined above. These cases are rare and involve a serious violation of an Ayusa rule or U.S. federal and/or state law.

To best support students and ensure that disciplinary action is conducted in a fair and unbiased manner, each step in the disciplinary process includes the following three elements:

1. If possible, prior to disciplinary steps going into effect, the Community Representative makes an effort to provide guidance to the student and to mediate between the student and other parties involved (if applicable). Students are verbally informed of the consequences of their behavior and have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.
2. Students are asked to write a statement expressing their perspective.
3. Regional Support Specialists with the assistance of Community Representatives conduct a thorough investigation to gather as much information as possible, to ensure that the perspectives of all parties involved are taken into consideration. In certain cases, Ayusa may solicit additional documentation from professional sources, such as physician's statements, psychological evaluations, etc. to accurately assess the situation.

Emergency Procedures

In general, an emergency is defined as any situation that is life-threatening or poses a major danger to a program participant's physical or emotional health. The following nine situations qualify as emergencies:

1. Death of a student
2. Death of an immediate host family member
3. Death of an immediate natural family member
4. Health crisis/major illness
5. Allegations of sexual abuse
6. Runaway/missing student
7. National disaster/political crisis
8. Arrest/imprisonment
9. Student is witness to a crime

Emergencies are closely managed by Ayusa headquarters and require notification of the United States Department of State. Swift communication with Ayusa is key so that staff are in a position to respond quickly and prevent further damage or escalation. In case of an emergency, it is critical that the Ayusa headquarters office be notified immediately. **We ask that anybody aware of a possible emergency concerning an Ayusa student contact the San Francisco office directly at +1.800.727.4540, PRESS 1, as soon as possible**— even if all of the details are not yet available.

4.

INSURANCE AND IMMUNIZATIONS

Student Insurance

Students are provided with medical insurance as part of the Ayusa program. Depending on their nationality, Ayusa students are covered by one of several medical insurance plans. Coverage is limited to emergencies and health problems of an unforeseen nature. **Students' insurance policies do not cover pre-existing conditions, nor can they be considered a comprehensive medical plan. This includes non-coverage for vaccinations and sports physicals. Some exceptions apply for YES students. See your YES Cluster Leader for additional information and instructions regarding insurance procedures.**

However, regardless of insurance coverage, students should always go to a doctor or hospital if they need medical care.

All students receive insurance policy information, an identification (ID) card, required forms, and detailed instructions on how to handle insurance claims. This information should be kept in a safe and accessible place known to both the student and the host family. Students should always carry their insurance ID card with them, as it may be required as proof of coverage if they need medical attention in an emergency. A copy of the ID card should be kept at home in case the original gets lost. Additional information can be found under the Resources tab of the student or host family portal.

Ayusa requests that host families review their students' insurance information as soon as possible, prepare in advance for situations that might require medical services for their student, and provide support with claims processing. Despite a thorough orientation, most students are not experienced in dealing with insurance claims and will rely on adult guidance. The following are basic suggestions on how to successfully handle insurance issues and respond to possible problems:



Tips: Handling Medical Insurance

- Students' health comes first. Take a sick or injured student to a doctor or hospital immediately if they need urgent care. Do not delay due to insurance coverage questions!
- Please notify your Community Representative of any illness or injury the student may have. Ayusa needs to be aware to provide assistance with the insurance process as needed, as well as keeping the overseas partner informed so they can inform the natural parents.
- Look over your student's insurance information in advance. If your student needs medical attention, or in case of an emergency, it will be helpful to already be familiar with this information.
- Students may be required to pay a small fee out of pocket at the time of a doctor's visit. Make sure they have money or a credit card with them to cover such fees.
- Call the 24-hour phone number of the insurance company (found on the student's Ayusa ID card) to get approval for non-urgent doctors' visits and to obtain instructions for claims processing. Make sure the doctor or clinic is covered by the insurance (the insurance company can provide a list of local doctors and/or care centers). In case of emergency, contact the insurance company after you have obtained medical care for the student. **NOTE: Dutch students (or their natural parents) must contact their insurance provider themselves to get the necessary authorization but may need your assistance in communicating their needs to ensure appropriate care and claims processing.**

- Insurance information and forms may be available on the insurance company’s website and may require login information. Go over this information with your student.

- Take the student to the hospital or doctor’s office and follow the insurance company’s instructions. Be sure to show the receptionist the student’s insurance/Ayusa ID card for their records, and so that the medical provider can submit claim forms. **Please make sure the hospital or doctor’s office is aware that they have permission to speak with any Ayusa Representative about the student’s illness/injury. This allows Ayusa to assist with the claims process, gather additional information needed to ensure ongoing medical needs are met, and determine the next steps regarding program participation if necessary.**

- Give the medical provider the student’s natural parent information (name, address, phone, and email) as the guarantor. For the in-country address for guarantor, use natural parent’s name with Ayusa’s address: Ayusa International, 455 Market Street, Suite 1700, San Francisco, CA 94105. Give them contact information for your Regional Support Specialist. **Do not sign as the guarantor.** This should alleviate any billing issues and put the responsibility for claims on the natural parents and Ayusa, and not you as the host parent.

- Providers usually submit forms directly to insurance companies, but students may need to pay for services and submit forms themselves. If so, make sure that the original medical bills and correct insurance company forms get mailed to the insurance company. When sending paperwork to the insurance company, always be sure to make and keep copies.

- The insurance company may send you additional forms requesting more information regarding the illness or injury. Please complete and return them promptly to ensure the claims process is not held up or denied. Forward a copy of the form to your Regional Support Specialist and keep a copy of it for your records as well.

- If bills have not been paid by the insurance company and you continue to get invoiced by the medical provider, contact your Regional Support Specialist or studentinsurance@ayusa.org for assistance.

Possible Insurance Problems and How to Respond

- While working through the claims process, if you experience any of these insurance problems: delay of payment, denial of a claim, or receipt of collections notices, contact your Regional Support Specialist or studentinsurance@ayusa.org for support. You will be asked to provide the student’s insurance information and copies of thorough documentation regarding the claim(s), including all bills and paperwork from the provider(s).

Student Immunizations

Student immunization records are updated throughout the summer, so **if additional information is needed, please consult your Community Representative (CR)**. In some cases, students may not have had the time or opportunity to receive all vaccinations required for school admission, particularly Grant (YES) students. **Natural parent permission, obtained by Ayusa, is needed for a student to receive any vaccination including the flu and COVID-19 vaccinations.**

If a school requests additional immunizations, contact your CR first. The student may have already received the necessary vaccine, but the school record may not yet be updated.

If additional vaccinations are required, do not schedule an appointment with a pediatrician, as **immunizations are not covered by the student’s insurance, except for students on the YES grant**. Instead, use local county health offices, CVS, Walmart, or pharmacies that provide immunizations.

5.

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The Stages of Cultural Adjustment

Adjusting to a different cultural environment is an exciting but also challenging process. Every student responds differently to the challenges, but former participants and Community Representatives in the program have observed that adapting to a different cultural environment happens in various stages.

In the beginning, students usually experience excitement. Everything seems interesting and they tend to focus on similarities between their country and the United States. After a while, the initial enthusiasm is often accompanied by—or even temporarily replaced by—what is commonly known as “culture shock.” The students’ focus shifts from similarities to differences between their home and host culture. This is often the stage when homesickness—missing home—kicks in.

Gradually, students overcome these challenges and begin to feel more comfortable in their new environment. After some time, they begin to function in the new culture with confidence and develop a sense of belonging.

Culture Shock

Almost every student experiences some level of “culture shock,” a term used to describe feelings such as anxiety, surprise, disorientation, homesickness, and confusion. Families might notice that students withdraw into their room, sleep excessively, lack motivation, fall behind at school, are irritable, and criticize American culture.

Successfully Coping With Culture Shock

Culture shock is a completely normal response for anyone faced with the challenges of adjusting to a new environment. Successfully coping is an essential part of the exchange student experience.

There are a number of strategies that are very effective in helping students with culture shock. Host families can be supportive by reminding their student of the following suggestions:



Prescription for Culture Shock

- **Get involved** in activities at school, such as sports teams and clubs.
- **Participate actively** in your host family’s life.
- **Venture out**, try new foods, make new friends, and be open to new experiences.
- **Be healthy**. Get plenty of rest and maintain a varied diet.
- **Be patient with yourself**. Adapting to a new environment takes time. It’s okay to make mistakes!
- **Laugh instead of cry** at your cross-cultural misunderstandings.
- **Reach out**. Ask for support from your host family, new friends, and Community Representative.
- **Learn as much as you can** about American culture to better understand cultural differences. If you are confused, ask questions. People will enjoy helping you.
- **Keep a journal** to record and express your experiences and feelings.
- **Focus on your goals** and what you hope to accomplish during your exchange experience.

6.

HOST FAMILY LIFE

American host families come from diverse ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds. They may consist of a mother, father, and their children all living at home together, or they might be single parents or “empty nesters” (people with children who no longer live at home). Some families might include same-sex partners, step-parents, step-children, or foster children; others may have grandparents or extended family members who are quite involved in their daily lives.

Motives for hosting are as diverse as the families who host. Some families have an interest in a specific culture; some, as descendants of immigrants, wish to connect with their own cultural heritage. Others simply wish to provide a special opportunity to a young person from another country.

Although Ayusa host families decide to host for many different reasons, they have two fundamental things in common:

1. Host families are **volunteers**. They do not receive any payment or compensation for hosting.
2. Host families all have different and valuable perspectives to offer.

The following section of this handbook is designed to help students and host families communicate effectively and foster good relationships right from the start.

Student Arrival

When students arrive, they are likely to be excited, nervous, and very tired from their travels. Families, don’t worry or be offended if your student appears emotionally and physically exhausted upon arrival. Allow time for students to rest and relax. The amount of time students need to get over their initial fatigue will vary.

The following are a few things to consider during the first few hours and days after a student arrives:



Host Family Tips for Welcoming Your Student

- **Remind students to call their parents** as soon as they arrive (keeping in mind the international time difference). Natural parents are likely to be worried, and students might be too tired to remember to contact them.
- **Give students time to sleep and relax.** It will take them a while to recover from jet lag and all their new impressions, which might feel overwhelming.
- **Give students a tour of your home** and neighborhood to familiarize them with their new environment.
- **Speak slowly and clearly** (not overly loud) while the student is growing accustomed to communicating in English. Expressing themselves in a foreign language and trying to understand what is being said can be exhausting and frustrating. Be patient and willing to repeat things, saying them in different ways, if needed.

- **Be patient.** Give students time to adapt to their unfamiliar environment. Even normally outgoing teenagers might be shy in the beginning. Avoid overwhelming the student with too many activities or expectations right away. This is not the time to throw a huge welcome party! Instead, slowly introduce the student to extended family and friends.
- **Help students feel comfortable** by asking about their needs and feelings. Do they have enough blankets and pillows in their bedroom? Are they hungry or thirsty? Would they like to rest alone in their room for a while? What would they like to do next? Students might have difficulty expressing their needs if they are having trouble with the language, are shy, or come from cultures where it is considered impolite to make requests of unfamiliar people without being encouraged.
- **Discuss modes of address.** As soon as possible, ask students if they would like to address you as “Mom” or “Dad,” or by your first or last name. You may want to give them a choice, as some students might feel uncomfortable speaking to you in a very familiar way until they get to know you better.
- **Place reasonable limits on physical interaction.** Remember that many exchange students come from cultures in which affection is not openly or physically displayed. Respect students’ wishes and nonverbal feedback regarding physical contact throughout the time they are staying with you.

Family Rules, Schedules, and Routines

Every family has its own house rules. Even within the same culture, these rules differ from family to family. Some of these rules are such an integral part of daily interactions that family members are not even aware of them. Put your family rules and habits into words and explain them to your student.

Communicating clearly about host family rules is an important way of helping students navigate through daily life, adjust to their new situation, and develop a good relationship with their host family. Plan to have a detailed conversation about family rules, schedules, and routines—ideally within the first week after arrival.

Students are expected to abide by their host family’s rules and adapt to family customs and routines.

Host families should be sure to address the following topics: school/extracurricular activities, expectations regarding grades, rules regarding dating, assigned chores, expectations regarding who pays during family outings, communication expectations (including texting/phone calls), having visitors while host parents aren’t home, who they spend time with, and any other pertinent rules or expectations. **It is highly recommended that host families write down the host family rules and provide a copy for the student or post them in a public place to ensure expectations are clear.**

To assist you with this process, we recommend using the “Getting to Know Each Other” worksheet (found within the Resources section of the student or host family account, or in the host family orientation online folder), a list of discussion topics Ayusa developed to help support good communication between host families and students right from the beginning. This conversation is an opportunity both for students to learn about their host family and for host families to learn about how the student’s family does things at home in their culture.

Leaving Students Home Alone

Ayusa recognizes that there are times that a host family might have planned a get-away that does not involve the student. We would like to clarify, however, that due to safety concerns, Ayusa **students are not to be left home alone overnight without being under the supervision of a responsible adult 25 years or older, approved by Ayusa.** While Ayusa recognizes that it is culturally acceptable in the U.S. to leave a student who is 18 years old home alone overnight, it is not permissible on program due to student safety concerns. Please consult your Community Representative for alternative options should the need arise.

Chores

It is common for American children and teenagers to be assigned chores (housework). Chores may include keeping one’s bedroom tidy, feeding pets or livestock, setting the table, washing dishes, doing laundry, vacuuming, dusting, etc. We encourage host families to treat exchange students as their own children, which includes expecting them to help with household work. However, students should not be expected to babysit on a regular basis, as the focus of the Ayusa program is on academic achievement and cultural immersion, which is distinctly different from an au pair or nanny program.



Host Family Tip for Success

To avoid misunderstandings due to cultural differences and the language barrier, be very specific when explaining chores to your student. Visual tools can be helpful in addition to explanations. We recommend demonstrating how to do the chore, then writing down instructions and the time the chore needs to be completed.

Curfew

For safety reasons, American parents closely monitor their children's social life and activities. Children, while they live at home, might be required to ask permission if they want to go out with friends. Parents usually want to meet their friends and, in most cases, there is a set curfew (a time when children must be home at night). Some host families may also require a student to use the Life360 app for safety purposes.

Many exchange students are used to having more independence and freedom in their home country and might initially struggle with the rules in their host homes because they perceive them as too strict. However, students are expected to change their lifestyle and abide by their host family's rules, including those related to social activities and curfew.

(Cell)Phone and Computer Use

Students are **REQUIRED** to have a cell phone with an American phone number. Students are fully responsible for their own phone bills and are expected to pay all their outstanding phone bills before returning to their home country. Please note that Ayusa cannot be held responsible for unpaid phone bills. To avoid problems, we strongly recommend that students purchase their own cell phone and plan for use during their program. Many students arrive with their own cell phone and may need assistance setting up an American phone number and service. Some providers offer special programs designed specifically for month to month use. Check with the providers in your area for additional information.

Ayusa asks that Ayusa host families refrain from adding their student to their current cell phone plan. While in some ways this might seem more convenient, in Ayusa's experience many student/host family issues have derived from doing so.

Regarding cell phone use, students must refrain from sending inappropriate text messages with content or images of a sexual nature (sexting). In many U.S. states, sexting can result in possible charges of creating, possessing, and distributing child pornography, which is considered a felony.

It is important to establish parameters for students regarding cell phone and computer use. Students are expected to abide by restrictions imposed by their host family as long as the student is not deprived of reasonable access and ability to reach out to Ayusa or their natural family. We suggest that students limit their contact with home to one call and/or e-mail per week. Please ask your Community Representative for the Cell Phone and Computer Use Agreement and the Internet Safety Pledge or find them within the Resources section of the student or host family account.

While it's appropriate to set guidelines for students on cell phone and computer use, U.S. Department of State Regulations prohibit the removal of an exchange student's personal property, which includes the confiscation of personal computers and cell phones. As an alternative, we suggest designating a location in a common area of the home where a student must store their cell phone or computer when not in use. If excessive cell phone and computer use becomes a problem that negatively impacts the student/host family relationship, please consult with your Community Representative who will mediate and, if necessary, ask Ayusa to address the issue.



Student Tips for Success

Remember, your host family and Ayusa are responsible for your safety and rules are in place for your own protection. You are in a new country and it will be more difficult for you to assess the safety of a situation and who can be trusted than in your home country. In addition, especially in the beginning, your host parents don't know you well enough to trust that you are able to make responsible decisions. You can help build trust and show your maturity by respecting their rules and acting responsibly.

When planning activities with friends, seek permission from your host parents well in advance and always let them know where you will be. If you think you will be late for curfew, always call your host parents. While this will not excuse you from any consequences, it will reassure them that you are safe. Over time, if you act in a mature manner, you might find that your host parents are willing to give you a little more freedom—but this is entirely up to them.

Money

Ayusa students are expected to cover their own expenses, including lunches purchased from the school cafeteria (if they choose not to bring a packed lunch from home), school supplies, club, and athletic fees, personal items (clothing, hygiene items, etc.), entertainment, and cell phones/cell plans and phone calls. Students should plan to have more money available at the beginning of the program for school-related fees, as well as at the end of the program for gifts, souvenirs, and outstanding bills that must be paid before they return to their home country.

YES students are on a full Department of State scholarship and will receive a small bi-monthly stipend for personal spending. The stipend funds are available for the student to access directly through the ReliaCard they will receive. In addition to the stipend, there are limited funds available for reimbursement of school supplies, clothing and limited medical costs. Please speak with your YES Cluster Leader for further information.

Ayusa strongly recommends that students have a *physical* international credit/debit card available for use upon their arrival in the U.S., as well as a small amount of cash in case issues arise with their card. Should a student need to open a bank account upon their arrival in the U.S., the student will need to seek assistance from their Community Representative.

Under no circumstances may students' funds be deposited into their host family's bank account, into a joint account, or into a new account under the host family's name. Host families may not make large purchases for students including, but not limited to, vehicles, pets, and cell phones.

Ayusa students are responsible for managing their own finances and must always be sure to have enough funds available to meet their needs. Students should not borrow money from (or lend money to) their host family or anyone else. If students have to ask their natural parents for more money, they should expect to allow approximately two weeks for the funds to arrive via international wire transfer.

Should a student require a special diet or eat an excessive amount of a certain food, they may be responsible for purchasing their own specific food items. The RSS or other Ayusa staff member will determine what is considered an excessive amount if this becomes an issue. Also, students are not to be wasteful with food that is provided to them.

As international J-1 exchange visitors, students are not allowed to work while on the Ayusa program, as this would be a violation of their visa status. However, they may work up to 10 hours per week for individuals, not businesses, to earn extra pocket money in non-competitive jobs such as babysitting, yard work, shoveling snow, and so on. It is important to discuss any work opportunities with the Community Representative and host family before accepting an offer.



Student Tips for Success

Create a monthly budget to help you manage your finances. Decide in advance how much you plan to spend on what per month (this amount for snacks, that amount on clothes, this amount for entertainment, etc.) so you don't run out of money unexpectedly.

Never give out your personal bank account or credit card information to anybody—not even your best friend!

Religion

Many American families have a religious affiliation and attend religious services regularly. Ayusa students are encouraged to participate in their host family's lives, including religious activities. In America, religious communities have an important social function, so attending church events is a great opportunity for students to get involved in a community and make friends. In addition, experiencing different expressions of faith and the varied roles religion plays in people's lives is a good opportunity for cross-cultural learning.

However, no pressure should be placed upon students to participate in religious activities. Ayusa does not sanction any attempts to change our students' religious beliefs. In fact, students are not permitted to convert to a religion different from their own, as this would be a life-changing decision, and therefore, a violation of the Ayusa rules.

If students wish to attend services of their own affiliation, they should feel free to do so. Ayusa appreciates the host family providing support by making any special arrangements necessary to accommodate their student's religious and spiritual needs.

Personal Hygiene

The standards regarding what is considered "clean" are culture-specific. For example, in some countries, bathing once a week is socially acceptable, but in the U.S., this would not be sufficient. Americans shower daily—usually in the morning before work or school—and change clothes frequently to remain free from body odor, which is considered to be offensive in the US. Students who are accustomed to different standards of personal hygiene might need to adjust their habits to be accepted in their new school and community. Additionally, according to the American Academy of Dermatology, teens are to shower daily. Therefore, students are encouraged to bathe and shampoo their hair once a day or every other day, wear a different shirt or top every day, wash their clothes often, and use personal hygiene products, such as deodorant, daily.

Successful Communication

When people of different backgrounds and personalities come together, there is great potential for meaningful connections and personal growth, but also a chance that problems and conflicts will occur. This is no different for students and host families. As in any relationship, effective communication is the basis for mutual understanding and respect. The following are 6 key elements to help avoid and address common problems that can lead to conflict.



6 Tips for Effective Communication

1. Don't be afraid to talk about your concerns and ask for support from people who might be able to help you find solutions.

Sometimes students and host families choose not to bring up issues that concern them or confide in people who cannot help resolve the problem. For example, students might discuss their concerns in detail with their natural parents or their overseas partner, but their host family or Community Representative is not aware that there is an issue. Ayusa has established clear recommendations for communication, which have proven to be most helpful in addressing and resolving problems.

2. Review your expectations, determine if they are appropriate and in line with the goals of the Ayusa program, and clearly communicate them.

In some cases, students find that their host family or host community is not what they expected and respond with frustration or hostility. They might even request to be moved. Host families might also have expectations regarding their students' personality and interests or compare them to exchange students they have hosted in the past. Unrealistic expectations can lead to a negative experience.

On the other hand, there are also appropriate expectations for behavior. We recommend that students keep an open mind about their new environment and look for positive experiences outside of their expectations. We recommend that host families communicate clearly and concretely about what behavior they consider appropriate. For example, host parents should ensure that their students fully understand what is expected of them in terms of chores or adjustments to family routines and American culture.

In general, having realistic expectations and communicating them clearly is crucial to a successful program experience for both students and families. Keeping expectations to a minimum at the beginning can also be helpful.

3. Be open-minded and try not to make assumptions.

Everybody has assumptions and judgments. We compare people and events to our familiar beliefs and value systems, many of which are cultural. For example, in some cultures, maintaining eye contact during a conversation is perceived as rude, while in the U.S. it is viewed as feedback that we are listening and interested in what someone is saying. However, not every conflict between people from different cultures is caused by cultural misunderstandings. Either way, it is easy to jump to conclusions and pass judgment, so it is important to keep in mind that in many cases, we might be missing critical information or have simply misunderstood.

4. Be curious and ask questions.

In addition to the challenges of navigating through a different culture, some students might be overwhelmed by having to constantly speak and understand English. It requires a great deal of effort to communicate in a foreign language and, especially in the beginning, this can cause some frustration and misunderstandings.

For students, asking questions is the best way to get additional information that might help you understand a situation and interpret someone's behavior and intentions more accurately—as they intended them. Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand something you hear or observe.

For host families, you can be supportive by encouraging students to ask questions. We recommend that host families speak slowly at first. If you are not clear that you have been understood, try asking students to repeat back in their own words what they understood from a conversation.

In addition, asking questions is a good way for host families to learn more about their students' cultural background, personality, and intentions.

5. Be respectful and considerate.

Despite their differences, people from all cultures respond to respect and disrespect. For example, a host family will likely be offended if their student never spends any time with them and only shows interest in going out with friends. Students might be upset if their host family does not express any interest in their culture or does not make an effort to pronounce their name correctly.

The way we show respect is different in each culture and even differs from one individual to another. However, for the most part, showing respect is fairly simple, and making an effort to be considerate of other people's needs goes a long way. In concrete terms, for students, this could mean saying "thank you" often, getting involved in family life, and showing appreciation for their host family's willingness to host them for the duration of the program. For host families, it could mean finding ways to help students feel comfortable and at home, and giving their student praise for overcoming challenges.

6. Contact your Community Representative.

Community Representatives are required to contact students and host families (separately) once per month, either in person, via email, or by phone. However, if you have any questions or feel the need for additional support, feel free to contact your Community Representative at any time. The sooner they have a chance to intervene and help resolve a problem, the more likely it can be mitigated to avoid a negative outcome.

Contact with the Natural Family

Ayusa understands that for some students this is their first time away from home and therefore, the urge to contact home frequently may be very strong. However, in Ayusa's experience, this makes it extremely difficult for students to fully engage in their program experience. If the student's focus is on home, it is not on those that are in direct contact with them who are able to provide them immediate support. In addition, excessive contact with home tends to increase feelings of homesickness.

Likewise, we ask that host families limit their contact with the natural family. Communication should remain positive and focus on positive experiences. Please refrain from going to the natural parents with behavioral issues, as cultural differences and communication issues could add to any difficulties the host family and student might be experiencing. These types of problems should be discussed with your Community Representative so that we can help you resolve the issues and manage the communication with the natural family through the overseas partner.

Re-matches

In Ayusa's experience, most issues between host families and students result from ineffective communication and misunderstandings based on cultural or personality differences. Therefore, Ayusa's approach is to first encourage our students and host families to make an effort to resolve problems by improving their communication and taking advantage of their Community Representative's support. Community Representatives and Regional Support Specialists are trained to mediate conflicts between students and host families. They can help both sides better understand each other's perspectives and resolve their issues together. In many cases, the result is an even stronger, closer relationship than before.

Often, in case of conflict or misunderstandings, **both the student and host family will be asked to provide the Community Representative with a written statement that explains their perspective and concerns.** Sending these statements in a timely manner will enable your Community Representative to assist with resolution more quickly. Ayusa will use these statements to better understand all perspectives and ensure that everyone has had the opportunity to express their point of view.

If over time, the family and student do not settle into a mutually satisfactory relationship, a rematch will be considered for the student, preferably within the same community to enable the student to stay in the same high school. Because the Community Representative will take the same care in re-matching as with the first match, **this process may take a few weeks.** We ask host families and students for patience and cooperation during this process. In extreme situations, a Community Representative may remove a student from the home and temporarily host them until a suitable family can be found.

In most cases, Ayusa expects that students and host families remain open to mediation and suggestions from their Community Representative to address conflict within a placement, rather than immediately requesting a re-match. Students and host families are expected to follow the rematch process carefully. Requests for an immediate rematch that are not related to safety, health, or well-being may be subject to review. Following the proper process ensures a smooth transition and the best possible experience for all involved.. Ayusa will review each case and make the final determination of whether a re-match is necessary. Ayusa reserves the right to immediately remove a student in any situation in which the student's safety or well-being is in question.

NOTES

7.

ACADEMIC LIFE

High school attendance is not only a requirement of the J-1 exchange visitor program but also an important part of the student's cultural experience in the United States. Ayusa relies on the generosity of American high schools to accept our students into their school system, and we greatly appreciate the tremendous opportunity they give to young people from all over the world. In return, we guarantee that Ayusa students are well prepared for academic success, and we are committed to providing the highest level of support to ensure that schools can fully enjoy the benefits of hosting an Ayusa student.

The following section is designed to help students understand cultural elements of American high school life, as well as provide helpful information for schools about Ayusa students.

Student Selection and Preparation

Before Ayusa students are accepted into the program, they must demonstrate strong academic potential through both course transcripts and school references. Students must be able to fully participate in an American high school and meet the academic requirements. Qualified English instructors assess their ability to speak, read, and write English. In addition, Ayusa students are screened for emotional maturity, focused goals, demonstrated leadership, and the ability to adapt to the challenges of life in the U.S.

Once selected for the program, Ayusa students are thoroughly prepared for their experience. Prior to arrival in the U.S., they receive an extensive pre-departure orientation facilitated by our partner organizations overseas. Upon arrival in their host communities, Community Representatives facilitate a local arrival orientation. Orientation subject matter includes American values and lifestyles, the role of the host family, high school life, program rules and expectations, and health insurance.

Academic Requirements

Ayusa students are expected to comply with the general school curriculum and schedule when choosing courses. Each student should work closely with a school guidance counselor to determine which class level to enter and which courses to select. **Wherever possible, we require students to enroll in a standard curriculum, including English, U.S. history or government, mathematics, and science.** If students have already achieved mastery levels in certain areas, or if a course is not available, they must substitute another core academic class. **Prior to changing a course, students must speak with their Community Representative** to ensure they are still meeting academic requirements. The remainder of the schedule may be made up of courses chosen by the student, such as additional core courses, art, music, drama, etc. Some schools require a class in physical education (sports). If students are unable to participate due to medical reasons, they may be excused. In addition, taking more than one study hall/academic aid type period will not be allowed, nor will "free periods" where a student is not required to be on school grounds.

Ayusa is an academic program; therefore, we require our students to maintain a grade of C or better in every class they attend and, in general, to make a positive contribution. Poor academic performance will be addressed with disciplinary steps and, in extreme cases, could lead to dismissal from the Ayusa program. **If students are receiving lower than a grade of C in any class, they are responsible for taking additional steps to raise their grade(s), including but not limited to securing a private tutor with assistance from the Community Representative and RSS or a tutor through the school.** Note: In most U.S. school systems, an A (excellent) is the highest grade, followed by B (good), C (average), D (poor), and F (fail/no credit).

Tuition and School Fees

The vast majority of Ayusa students attend public schools, which are free of charge. However, some students attend private schools. In these cases, Ayusa secures written consent from the natural parents and ensures that they have agreed to cover tuition fees. This agreement must be given at the time of student application before the DS-2019 Form has been issued.

Public and private schools may charge various fees related to school-sponsored activities or clubs. Additional fees may be required for school lunches, books (in some states), computer rental, sports participation, bus transportation, late fees for library books, a high school yearbook, or items related to graduation, such as a cap or gown, if the student participates in graduation activities. Students are responsible for all such expenses.

Studying and Homework Assignments

Students may have to spend a significant amount of time studying to ensure that they get a good start in their new school and succeed academically. **This includes completing all homework and class assignments.** Students should expect to get homework assignments in every class and on a daily basis. In order to receive full credit, the **work must be completed and turned in on time.**



Student Tips for Success

- **Make sure** you understand what is expected of you regarding homework assignments. If you are not sure what you are supposed to do, ask your classmates or teacher for clarification.
- **Balance your time** between studying, your host family, and new friends, so you can be successful in both of the major goals of the Ayusa program: academics and cultural exchange.
- **Home country academics:** Although it is not encouraged, continuing studies, taking courses, taking exams, or receiving tutoring for home-country coursework may occur. However, **this is only acceptable if it does not interfere with full participation in the program.** Should these activities become a distraction or barrier to program engagement, they may be required to cease.

Extracurricular Activities

American high schools usually offer a variety of activities for students to choose from outside the required academic curriculum. These activities include athletic teams (American football, basketball, volleyball, swimming, etc.), civic education (debate teams, student government, school newspaper, etc.), creative expression (theater, arts, dancing, etc.), and community service (raising funds for charity, working at a soup kitchen for the homeless, building housing for low-income people, etc.). When available, students are encouraged to become involved in activities early in the school year. Participating in extracurricular activities is a privilege, not a right, and therefore, if the activity interferes with the student's program in any way, they may be required to cease participation.

There are some schools, for various reasons, that do not allow exchange students to participate in extracurricular activities. In those instances, it will be important for the student, host family, and Community Representative to be creative in finding ways to assist the student in developing friendships and remaining active in the community. Agreed upon activities must be able to be accommodated by the host family. Suggestions may include church programs, community sports programs, or volunteer opportunities. A student may also take the opportunity to work with the school/community to develop a program that supports exchange students while preserving local rules and guidelines. Speak with your Community Representative about assisting you to approach the school and/or community if this is a project you are interested in, **but please know that ultimately extracurricular activities are not guaranteed.**

Ayusa provides additional opportunities for our students to become actively involved in their host communities. Each November, the U.S. Department of State promotes International Education Week (IEW). Exchange students are encouraged to share information about their home countries and cultures with their schools and communities. In support of IEW, Ayusa has a contest in which students are invited to submit their cultural presentations. Prizes for the top entries are awarded.

In addition to IEW, students are strongly encouraged to become involved in community service activities as these are a great opportunity to give back to their host communities. Ayusa sponsors an annual Community Service Contest (CSC) and awards outstanding students for their volunteer service. For detailed information about IEW and the CSC, students should contact their Community Representative.



Student Tips for Success

Don't hesitate to participate in a range of school sports, clubs, and activities that appeal to you, as well as IEW and community service. These are excellent opportunities to make friends in your host community and will greatly support your adjustment to your new environment. It's easier to get to know people when you share interests and participate in an activity together. Community service, especially, is focused on caring for others, so you're likely to find people in these groups who are open to befriending a new person.

Dress Code

Most public schools in the U.S. do not have school uniforms, but many have dress codes regulating student attire. Dress codes usually include limitations on how short a skirt or pair of shorts can be, and how much skin may be exposed. They generally include prohibitions on clothing with tears or holes, exposure of undergarments, and anything that the school and local culture consider obscene, gang-related, or unsafe. Some school dress codes specify the types of tops (e.g. collared) and bottoms (e.g. no jeans) that are allowed. Ayusa students are expected to comply with all aspects of their school's policies, including the dress code.



Student Tips for Success

Outside of school, consider how you might be perceived based on your appearance. Compared to major cities, rural American communities might have modest and slightly conservative views regarding appropriate clothing. If you make an effort to adapt to your host community, you will find that people are more open to approaching and getting to know you. On the other hand, don't dress in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable just to fit in.

Making Friends

When exchange students start school, they often receive a warm welcome. American peers are eager to meet them, fascinated by their foreign accent and curious about their home country. After a while, though, the novelty can wear off and exchange students might find that people are not as interested and friendly as they were in the beginning.

Culturally, Americans tend to be very open and friendly at first, but this behavior does not always develop into close friendships. For example, exchange students are occasionally confused when someone asks them "How are you?" and does not seem to want to listen to a genuine response, or when the comment "I'll call you later!" produces no follow-up. To many Americans, "How are you?" is simply a greeting equivalent to "Hello," and the expected answer is "Fine, how are you?" Offers of further contact may be intended as a friendly gesture not to be taken literally.

Some students respond with frustration to these experiences and get discouraged. They might judge their American peers as superficial and choose to primarily associate with other exchange students who can relate to their experiences. However, this response is not productive since the best way to experience American culture is to make American friends. We recommend students view such unfamiliar behaviors as expressions of cultural differences and not let the complexities of cross-cultural social communication prevent them from forming close and meaningful friendships.



- **Ask your host siblings** to introduce you to their friends (if you have host siblings close to your age).
- **Be outgoing** and take the initiative. Don't just wait for people to approach you. Ask questions!
- **Join clubs, sports, and youth group activities** early in your program where you can connect with people through common interests.
- **Get to know all types of people with different interests and build a variety of friendships.** Embrace the opportunity to connect with individuals from different backgrounds and experiences to make the most of your exchange year.
- **Invite people to your home** to spend time ("hang out") or study together. Just make sure to get permission from your host parents first!
- **Be patient.** It takes time to build close friendships.
- **Be smart and selective** regarding whom you choose to be friends with. Don't associate with people who may tempt you to use alcohol and drugs, skip school, or participate in any other activities that are a violation of U.S. law or the Ayusa rules. Breaking the law or Ayusa rules could result in your dismissal from school, the program, and even imprisonment or deportation from the U.S.
- **Enjoy a healthy balance** between time with your host family and friends. Building strong relationships with both will enrich your exchange experience and create lasting memories.

Dating and Sexual Activity

Ayusa strongly recommends that students refrain from becoming romantically involved while on program. Doing so isolates the student from establishing friendships with other students and tends to interfere with students developing strong relationships with their host family.

Dating is very common among American teens. There are casual forms of dating, such as informally going out to see a movie together or doing other fun activities either with a group or as a couple. In these situations, expectations are light and everybody pays their own way. On the other hand, there are also official dates in which one person asks another one out with the intention of pursuing a more serious relationship. For example, an invitation to go as a couple to a school dance might be casual between close friends but more formal between two students who are less acquainted.

If someone offers to pay for your food or entertainment, this might be a sign that they are romantically interested, but it does not obligate you to date them exclusively or become more intimate with them in any way. Trust your instinct about expectations and act according to your comfort level. It is perfectly acceptable to turn down an invitation for a date or time with someone alone if you are uncomfortable in any way.

Before even considering going on a date, **Ayusa students must have a conversation with their host parents to find out what their rules are for dating.** Most American parents are more conservative than, for example, their European counterparts and do not allow their teenage children to date someone seriously or to be sexually active. Even if students had a boyfriend or girlfriend in their home country and were sexually active before, they are expected to refrain from sexual activity while on program, as this has the potential to lead to life-changing and/or dangerous situations. Additionally, students are expected to abide by their host family's rules about dating.

Appropriate Conduct

All participants are selected for the Ayusa program based on their maturity and proper motivation. Therefore, it is expected that Ayusa students will always conduct themselves in an appropriate and respectful manner, including at school, at their host family's home, at extracurricular activities, and when socializing with peers.

Appropriate conduct applies to language and behaviors. When interacting with others, it's important that participants consider how they are being perceived and if their forms of self-expression fall in line with being an ambassador of their country. This includes using appropriate and respectful language, specifically refraining from cursing. Participants might find that it's easier to curse in another language, but the effects are still the same. Students will harm their reputation and opportunities for positive interactions with Americans.

Inappropriate behaviors range from small gestures such as defiant body language to open aggression. Ayusa students must refrain from sexually harassing, sexually assaulting, bullying, threatening, using derogatory language regarding people who may look, think, or believe differently, or committing an act of violence against any individual at any time. **All allegations of any Ayusa student accused of participating in any of the aforementioned behaviors while in the United States will be taken seriously. Such cases will be evaluated for probation or dismissal.**



Student Tips for Success

- **Keep it light.** A serious relationship, whether with a friendship or romantic relationship, will likely have a negative effect on your ability to have a successful experience in the program. It's easy to become preoccupied with the emotional ups and downs of a relationship. This can prevent you from being open to experience the full range of American life in your host community. Also, keep in mind that you will return to your home country at the end of the program. If you get too emotionally attached to someone, you are setting yourself up for a painful separation!
- **Be responsible and act maturely.** Sexual relationships come with a number of inherent risks, including intense feelings, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. The Ayusa program is an opportunity to participate in a different culture, but don't do anything or take any risks you know your natural parents or host parents wouldn't approve of. If your host parents or Community Representative show concern about a relationship you are having, understand that although this might be partly a matter of different cultural values, it is primarily based on concern for your physical and psychological safety.
- **Be safe.** Dating can be dangerous and lead to experiences you do not consent to, such as sexual assault or rape. This is especially true when alcohol or drugs are involved. Someone who is drinking might be out of control. If you are drinking, you will find it harder to make safe decisions and choices. For your protection, do not put yourself in situations or engage in any activities that pose a risk to your safety and well-being. Please also carefully review the section on "Safety."

Diplomas and Graduation

School policies regarding graduation of exchange students vary greatly, and in some cases, are regulated by the state government. Ayusa students must understand that their school administrators decide whether they will be allowed to receive a diploma or participate in the graduation ceremony. Students may request a Certificate of Attendance or a letter stating the school's accreditation policy for exchange students, but under no circumstances should students or host families demand a diploma or any official document. Students are guests at their school, and must fully accept its rules. Ayusa will not move students to a different school so that they can graduate or obtain a diploma.

Academic Credit and Convalidation

Depending on your country of origin, your year in the United States may or may not be recognized for academic credit by your school back home. In some cases, you will be required to authenticate the official grade transcripts you receive from your school in the U.S. before returning home. This process is called convalidation.

The convalidation process varies depending on your country of origin. Some students have special academic requirements, and in order to receive credit for their year of study in the U.S., they must take and pass certain required courses. If this applies to you, it is important that you share this information in the application process so Ayusa can ensure your potential school can meet your needs. At the end of the school year, some students must have their transcripts and diplomas (if issued by their school) notarized, verified by the County Clerk, and then legalized by the Secretary of State.

Ask your sending organization what you must do to receive credit in your home country for your coursework in the U.S. **It is entirely the student's responsibility, not Ayusa's or the host family's, to complete the convalidation process before returning home.**

Successfully Addressing Problems

Ayusa appreciates the time and dedication school administrators and guidance counselors devote to supporting exchange students. Though the exchange experience is ultimately very rewarding, students often find the early weeks and months challenging as they move through different stages of homesickness, culture shock, and academic and host family adjustments.

Occasionally, students' English might "freeze" when they arrive. It is harder to speak and understand American English in the U.S. than to practice it in the academic environment of their home country. This difficulty, along with the challenge of adjusting to cultural differences and academic requirements, might impact the student's ability to keep up academically. In rare cases, frustration and confusion might even lead to behavioral issues. The vast majority of students quickly overcome these challenges and once they adjust to life in the U.S., these issues resolve themselves. However, occasionally problems persist and need to be addressed with the help of a Community Representative.

Ayusa very much appreciates that the success of every student depends upon the strength of our school partnerships and on establishing and maintaining open communication with one another throughout the school year. Community Representatives will be in frequent contact with schools, at a minimum of once every two months. However, if problems arise, we respectfully ask that counselors or other school professionals call the Community Representative immediately. This helps us gain a more complete understanding of the issues at hand and enables the Community Representative to intervene at an early stage and partner with the school to resolve difficulties. If problems cannot be resolved within a reasonable amount of time, Ayusa has disciplinary procedures in place and, in serious cases, is prepared to dismiss a student from the program (see details outlined in the section on "Disciplinary Procedures"). Please note that as the Department of State approved sponsor of our student's visa, it is paramount that the school communicates with Ayusa as needed. This allows us to not only assist in resolving issues but to communicate any issues with the natural parents who entrust us with the care of their child.

Ayusa students are subject to the same academic and social regulations as any other student in their school. Disciplinary action should be implemented by the school as deemed necessary. However, this does NOT include corporal punishment. If a school is not willing to exempt Ayusa students from corporal punishment, Ayusa will not place students in that school.



Student Tips for Success

- **Ask questions at school.** If you have a difficult time understanding what is being discussed in class, ask your classmates or teacher for clarification. Make sure you understand what is expected of you. If the teacher cannot make time to address all of your questions during class, or you don't feel comfortable asking in front of your classmates or taking up class time, ask to speak with your teacher either after the class or at the end of the school day. Take any opportunity to ask for clarification until you are able to better understand what is being communicated on your own. Don't worry, things will become clearer with time!
- **Make an appointment to meet and talk to your guidance counselor.** American schools assign a guidance counselor to each student to help them register for classes, monitor their academic progress, and provide them with support for any school or personal problem. Your counselor can also be a valuable resource for you regarding school policy, school life, and activities that might be available to you.
- **Contact your Community Representative.** If you continue to struggle academically and have trouble understanding and communicating in English, inform your Community Representative. Your Community Representative will get you a private tutor—paid for by your natural parents—and help you come up with additional ideas to succeed in school.

8.

SAFETY

As the program sponsor, Ayusa is responsible for our student's safety and well-being while they reside in the United States. We take this responsibility very seriously and we reserve the right to make decisions we consider to be in Ayusa students' best interests.

We aim to provide Ayusa students with a secure and nurturing environment that allows them to successfully complete their program. In order to prevent and address potential dangers, Ayusa relies on open communication from students and the support of host families and schools.

The following section is designed to:

- Raise general awareness about safety concerns and help students identify unsafe situations.
- Discuss what students can do to avoid unsafe situations and protect themselves and how their host families can support them.
- Provide information about support resources and encourage students to reach out for help at any time.

General Safety

Given that Ayusa students are in an entirely unfamiliar environment, they need specific guidance on issues of personal safety. General safety considerations are simple and, to a large extent, a matter of common sense. Students might be used to similar general safety rules at home. Host parents with children of their own are likely to be familiar with local safety concerns such as an unsafe swimming spot, dangerous areas of town, signs of local gang activity, and can contribute additional useful advice.

Students should keep in mind that they won't be able to identify potentially dangerous situations in the U.S. as easily as they would in their home country, where they are familiar with cultural cues and are fluent in the language. Friends are a reliable source if they warn of dangers, but as teenagers themselves, they might not be accurate when it comes to assessing risks. Therefore, Ayusa students are advised to respect the opinions and advice of their host family and other responsible adults.

Ayusa asks students and host families to review, discuss, and follow the six basic safety tips below.



Student Tips for General Safety

1. Learn your host family's telephone number and address as soon as possible and familiarize yourself with your new surroundings.

Ask your host family to take you on a walking tour of their neighborhood. Learn the surrounding streets and main roads by name and take note of landmarks. Ask your family to help you draw or buy a map and mark your route to school, stores, friends' houses, or other locations you might visit. Also, come up with a plan for what to do in case you get lost. For example, if you are at a public event surrounded by many people, plan a time and a place to meet in case you are separated.

2. Don't give out your or your host family's personal information.

Be sure to check with your host family before giving out their telephone number, address, or other personal information to anyone, unless you know them well. Don't give out your own contact information in your home country, the name of your school, or other personal information to strangers.

3. Introduce your friends to your host parents.

Once you start to make friends at school or in the neighborhood, make sure your host parents meet them. Always check in with your host parents before going out with somebody new. This includes accepting rides or visiting other homes.

4. Always tell your host parents where you are going.

Telling someone where you will be at all times keeps you safe. Your host family will know that you are going to a safe place and will be able to contact you in an emergency. If you do not return, they would be able to retrace your steps. Leave a phone number where you can be contacted and the address where you will be with your host family before you go out.

5. Don't go out alone, and never go out with someone you don't know.

Think before you accept an invitation. Remember that you'll find safety in groups; avoid going out alone. If you avoid situations that might not be safe, you are already one step ahead.

6. Learn the emergency numbers for the police and fire station in your region.

In some areas of the U.S.—but not all—911 is a universal emergency telephone number. If you do not know the emergency numbers you need in a crisis, dial “0” for operator and ask for help. If you are in public, you can always ask any police officer you see to assist you. They can contact your host family for you, give directions, or even transport you to a safer place.

Extreme Sports/Activities:

Extreme sports and activities, such as, but not limited to: sky-diving, bungee jumping, wingsuit flying, hang gliding, flying in a non-commercial plane or glider, base jumping, cliff diving, etc., are deemed too dangerous and students are not allowed to participate in these activities for safety reasons. This also applies to hunting, shooting, or any other activity that involves using a gun or a similar weapon.

Ayusa is responsible for the safety of students while on program and therefore, we cannot allow students to participate in any activity where there is an increased risk for severe injury or death.

Participants understand that participation in extreme sports or activities as described above will result in progressive disciplinary action (warning letter, probation or potential dismissal).

Ayusa reserves the right to make decisions in the interest of students' safety and security, and such decisions are considered final. See, “Rule 5: Driving and Extreme Activities”.

Internet Safety

In addition to the useful and educational information available on the Internet, a great deal of content exists that is not appropriate for teenagers. This content includes nudity or other sexually explicit material, hate or racist websites, websites that threaten U.S. national security (such as links to terrorist or suspected terrorist organizations), materials promoting the use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs, and graphic violence.

Social networking sites have morphed into a mainstream medium for teens and adults. These sites encourage and enable people to exchange personal information about themselves, share pictures and videos, write blogs, and send private messages to friends, people who share their interests, and the world at large. It is important to be aware of the possible dangers of networking online, including sexual exploitation or solicitation, and to limit others' access to your personal information.

Parents sometimes feel outpaced by their technologically savvy kids. Regardless, an open conversation about expectations and ground rules regarding computer use will help prevent problems. Here are nine internet safety rules that are essential for protecting students, as well as host families. Although this information was covered at student orientations, Ayusa encourages host families to go over these rules again with their students.

The “Ayusa Internet Safety Pledge” can be accessed using the QR code at the end of the handbook as a resource for host families.



Student Tips for Internet Safety

1. Talk with your host parents about their expectations and follow their ground rules for using the computer.

Rules for being online might include the time of day, the length of time, whom you may communicate with, and appropriate websites for you to visit. Do not access other areas without your host family's permission. Follow your host family's rules for your and their safety. For example, in the U.S., it is against the law to look at certain pornographic and sexually explicit sites. If your host family's computer shows a record of going to those sites—even if you clicked on them accidentally by following a link—you and they could get arrested by the police and prosecuted.

2. Do not download anything from anyone you don't know.

Offensive content, spam, junk email, or messages from online contacts that you do not know in person may contain viruses that can damage your host family's computer.

3. Keep your and your host family's identity private.

Never share personal information, such as your full name, mailing address, telephone number, the name of your school or sports team, credit card numbers, or any information that could enable someone to identify or locate you offline. Also, do not reveal any personal information about your host family or friends. Make sure your screen name doesn't say too much about you. Don't use your name, your age, or your hometown. Even if you think your screen name makes you anonymous, it doesn't take a genius to combine clues to figure out who you are and where you can be found. This could lead to you being stalked by a stranger or having your identity and money stolen.

4. Be very selective and thoughtful about where you post.

Learn about how different sites work before joining. Some sites will allow only a defined community of users to access posted content; others allow anyone and everyone to view posts. If you have to wonder if a site you want to use is appropriate, it probably isn't.

5. Do not "friend" anyone whom you either do not know and/or with whom you have not previously corresponded.

We recommend that you restrict access to your page to a select group of people. For example, your friends from school, your club, your team, your community groups, or your family.

6. Use privacy settings to restrict who can access and post on your website.

Some social networking sites have strong privacy settings. Use these settings to limit who can see your online profile. Keep in mind that even if privacy settings are turned on, some—or even all—of your profile might be viewed by a broader audience than you are comfortable with.

7. Do not flirt with strangers online and never agree to meet a new online friend in person.

This could have serious consequences. Some people lie about who they really are and you never really know who you're dealing with. Social media is frequently used by those involved in human trafficking, especially sex trafficking. Please be aware and be cautious.

8. Never respond to online communication that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Immediately tell your host parents if you receive any communication that makes you uncomfortable, confused, or scared. Never respond to messages that are rude or offensive. Show messages like these to your host parents so that they can decide if it is necessary to contact Ayusa or other authorities.

9. Never meet in person anyone you have met online.

The greatest danger from going online is meeting someone in person that you only know online. Due to the anonymity of the internet, people can easily lie about themselves and hide their true intentions. As mentioned above, this is a common means for sex traffickers to find their victims.

Sexual Harassment and Abuse

Although sexual abuse, or any other form of exploitation, rarely occurs during a student's exchange experience, it is important to discuss in detail because young people are more at risk than adults. In addition, exchange students are in an unfamiliar environment. They may misinterpret cues and be unsure of how to respond if they are inappropriately approached.

Sexual abuse is defined as ANY unwanted physical touching, including being pressured to touch or kiss someone, touching of private parts of the body, being forced to look at pornographic materials, or any sexual behaviors that make someone feel uncomfortable. Abusive behavior can potentially come from anybody, even trusted adults, friends, or authority figures, such as religious leaders or teachers.

Ayusa encourages host families to open up a dialogue about safety with their students early in the exchange program to let them know that host families, along with their Community Representative, are responsible for ensuring their student's safety and well-being in the United States.

The following are not only appropriate but the most effective ways for students to respond to inappropriate and unwanted advances from any adult (or teenager):



Student Tips on How to Respond to Unwanted Advances & Stay Safe

1. Trust your feelings.

Listen to your intuition and follow your best judgment. If someone tries to touch you when you do not want them to, remember that this is not acceptable behavior. Even if you are not sure about their intentions or the cultural differences involved, listen to your feelings: if it does not feel right, take your feelings seriously and take action!

2. Say "No" or "Stop" in a firm, loud voice if you feel uncomfortable or threatened.

You have the right to reject unwanted and inappropriate attention from anybody. Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself. If anyone treats you or speaks to you in a way that makes you feel threatened or uncomfortable, tell them, and tell them to stop. Remove yourself from the situation as quickly as possible, or join a group of people. It is more important to protect your safety by getting out of a threatening or uncomfortable situation than to sound "polite" or worry about hurting someone's feelings. If you misunderstood a person's intentions, someone who does not wish to harm you will be supportive of you being cautious and taking care of yourself.

3. Reach out for help and talk to an adult you trust.

Ask for help if you are uncomfortable or concerned about a situation. You can talk to your host family and there is always an adult at Ayusa who can help you. You can also talk with another adult that you trust: a teacher, school counselor, or a friend's parent. Do not be afraid of getting someone in trouble. You are protecting yourself and other teenagers by sharing what you have experienced or seen. A victim of abuse, sexual abuse, or assault is never at fault. Sometimes people feel nervous reporting this type of information. We understand it is difficult and want to help you be safe and comfortable. You will not be blamed for reporting something of this nature. Telling someone is always the right thing to do!

4. Contact Ayusa.

Ayusa is always ready and prepared to help. If you feel uncomfortable or threatened at any time during your exchange experience, contact your Community Representative for support. In crisis situations when you need immediate help and cannot get in contact with your Community Representative, or if you do not feel comfortable talking to your Representative, you can contact your Regional Support Specialist, Regional Manager, or Ayusa Headquarters, at +1.800.727.4540. In case of an emergency, you should also contact your local police department, or call 911 (if the 911 emergency service is available in your area). If you do not know the number of your police department and need to contact them quickly, dial "0" for the operator and request the number.

Important Note: Any allegation or suspicion of sexual abuse of an Ayusa student must be immediately reported to Ayusa Headquarters in San Francisco using our 24-hour toll-free emergency number: +1.800.727.4540.

9.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Online social networking sites have become popular for both casual socializing and professional networking, and every day new digital tools introduce additional opportunities for individuals to expand their virtual presence. Social media is an important part of students' daily lives and can greatly enrich the Ayusa exchange experience by allowing students to communicate with friends and family, document their experiences, share photos, and enhance cultural understanding through these ever-evolving platforms.

However, social networking also presents challenges, including the risk of online predators seeking contact with potential victims, the potential exposure of private information that compromises personal safety, the spread of harmful or slanderous comments, and the misuse or misinterpretation of posts by a wide and unintended audience. Students are to refrain from using online dating applications. In addition, students should be mindful that posts, videos, or reels including trends involving host family complaints or rematch discussions—can be hurtful, misleading, or damaging, and must avoid creating or sharing content that could be misunderstood or perceived as inappropriate, suggestive, or disrespectful.

Students must also understand that sending sexually inappropriate or explicit images privately to peers, even if communication seems consensual or temporary, can result in serious personal, safety, and legal consequences. Such behavior is strictly prohibited and may jeopardize the student's standing in the program.

With these concerns in mind, Ayusa has established the following social networking policy that applies to all students for the duration of their program:

Students will be held responsible for everything posted to or linked to their social media and networking profiles, including statements, comments, videos and photos. Students must refrain from posting any content or images that indicate a violation of local, state, or federal laws or of Ayusa rules, as well as any content or images that could be perceived as obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, hateful, suggestive, or harmful to another person's reputation. Students must also avoid online activity that could compromise their own safety or the safety and privacy of their host family, including communicating with or meeting strangers, or posting identifying information such as full names, addresses, phone numbers, school details, or financial information. Any violation of these expectations may result in disciplinary action, including warnings, probation, or dismissal from the Ayusa program.



Student Tips for Responsible & Beneficial Online Behavior

1. Obey the Law

Don't post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate applicable local, state or federal laws or regulations.

2. Think Before You Post

Something you post online could be the first impression that people have of you. You are representing yourself, your culture, and the Ayusa program as a junior ambassador of your country. Remember that your readers include friends, your natural parents, host family, teachers, Community Representatives, the college you might want to apply to next year, as well as the job you might want to apply for in five years. Consider that before you publish and make sure you aren't alienating any of these groups. Even your screen name could reflect on your character. Think about the impression that screen names and email addresses make. Only post information that you are comfortable with others seeing and knowing about you. Remember that once you post information online, you can't take it back. Even if you delete the information from a site, older versions exist on other people's computers and can be circulated forever.

3. Be Careful When Posting Photos, Videos, or Reels

Sharing photos, videos, or reels through social networking sites is one way that many participants share their lives and exchange experience with friends and family. However, these can be altered and broadcast in ways that are beyond your control. If you do post photos, videos, or reels, ask yourself whether you would be comfortable having them displayed in a public forum. Also, keep in mind that any photos, videos, or reels showing Ayusa participants in situations or actions that violate Ayusa rules may result in disciplinary action.

4. Be Respectful

Be respectful towards others, in particular towards your host family and people in your host community. Do not post any material that can be considered defamatory, threatening, harassing, or hateful. Posting inappropriate comments or images of an individual can be very hurtful and damaging to their reputation. Regardless of the intention, rumors continue to have a lasting effect on your host family because they will remain in the community long after you have returned home. Also, respect the privacy and the opinions of others. Before sharing a comment or posting a picture or video about a friend, host family member, staff, etc. online, his/her consent is not only a courtesy, it is a requirement.

5. Exercise Good Judgment

When posting to a blog or on a social networking site, refrain from discussing controversial or potentially inflammatory subjects, including politics, sex, religion, or any other subjects that could offend people. Avoid personal attacks, online fights, and hostile communications. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative. Avoid sounding condescending or “loud” by using capital letters, as they are seen as rude.

6. Be Safe

Refer to the section on “Internet Safety.”

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Content Awareness

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools—including apps that generate images, videos, writing, or voice recordings—are increasingly used by teenagers around the world. While these tools can be creative and educational, they also bring new risks. Exchange students must use AI responsibly and in ways that protect their safety, privacy, and program standing.

Students must follow these expectations when using any AI-enabled platform:

- Do not use AI tools to create, modify, or share images, videos, or audio of real people without their knowledge and permission. This includes host family members, classmates, teachers, Ayusa staff, and other exchange students.
- Do not use AI to create misleading, inappropriate, or suggestive content, even if the student believes it is meant as a joke or harmless trend.
- Do not use AI to create or share false information about individuals, host families, schools, or communities. This includes AI-generated “stories,” fabricated screenshots, or altered media that could damage someone’s reputation.
- Never submit AI-generated schoolwork as your own. Academic dishonesty violates school rules and Ayusa expectations and may result in disciplinary action.
- Be cautious of AI chatbots or tools that request personal information. Students must not share addresses, phone numbers, school names, identification documents, financial information, or other private details with AI systems or online tools.
- Do not use AI to respond to Ayusa statement requests or communicate with your CR and Ayusa staff.
- Do not use AI to attempt to bypass rules or parental/host family restrictions, including social media age restrictions, location settings, or school technology safeguards.
- Students remain fully responsible for all content generated by or posted using AI, even if they did not “create” it manually. AI-generated content that violates Ayusa rules, the law, or school policies will result in disciplinary consequences.

Ayusa encourages students to ask their host families, teachers, or Community Representative for guidance if they are unsure whether an AI tool or generated content is appropriate or safe.

10.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL DURING AYUSA PROGRAM

If you wish to travel internationally after your initial arrival in the U.S. and during your Ayusa program, you must:

- Receive written permission from Ayusa using the Request for Student Travel form and follow all rules regarding travel (refer to “Rule 8: Travel”).
- Receive authorization (also called Travel Validation) on an official immigration document to re-enter the United States to resume your program.
- Receive notarized, written permission from your natural parents if the country you are traveling to requires it.
- NOTE: YES students who wish to travel internationally should speak with their YES Cluster Leader for additional requirements, including the purchase of supplemental insurance.

All Request for Student Travel steps must be completed prior to booking travel. We recommend that you start the process at least 2 months in advance to ensure the necessary steps are completed in a timely manner to avoid increased travel costs.

Once the Request for Student Travel form is approved, an Ayusa Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO) will electronically sign the Travel Validation section of the DS-2019 ('Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status') form. The signed DS-2019 will be emailed to the student by their RSS and must be carried during travel. It is not necessary to send in your DS-2019 form to Ayusa Headquarters.

You must carry your signed DS-2019 form with you when you travel and present it to the immigration officer with your passport when you re-enter the United States at the conclusion of your trip.

To travel outside of the United States during your Ayusa program, you must:

- Receive an approved Request for Student Travel form from your Community Representative.
- Verify if you need a separate visa to travel to your destination and obtain one if necessary. To find this information, contact the local consulate of the country you will be visiting.
- Have a passport and J-1 visa for the U.S. that is valid on the date you will re-enter the U.S.
- Confirm that your visa is stamped “M” for multiple entries. This “M” means that you can enter and leave the U.S. multiple times during your Ayusa program. If your visa is marked “S” for single entry, you cannot travel outside of the United States during your program and re-enter.

Always make copies of your documents:

- DS-2019 form
- I-94 departure/arrival card
- passport
- visa page



11.

RETURNING HOME

Preparing for the end of the program is as important as preparing for the beginning of the program.

For students, getting ready to return home means taking practical steps as well as saying goodbye to the people and places you connected with over the course of the program. For host families, it means saying goodbye and adjusting to one fewer household member.

A few weeks prior to departure, Community Representatives conduct a re-entry orientation to prepare students and host families for the end of the program. This orientation includes a detailed discussion addressing the challenges of going home and saying goodbye.

Refer to *Rule 10: Returning Home / Program Release* on page 12 for specific information about end of program.



Student Tips for Returning Home

Make your return flight arrangements early. The first step is to decide when you want to return home. **Make sure to discuss your plans with your host family to accommodate their needs as well. Generally, you should return home within two weeks of your last day of school.** If you have an open return ticket, contact the airline to book your return flight. Ayusa suggests doing this as early as January or February because flights fill up quickly during the summer holidays and seat availability is limited. If the agency in your home country is booking your return flight, contact them early in the year to find out what the process is and if anything is required from you.

Pay all of your bills. Prior to departure for your home country, make arrangements to pay off all of your debts, including telephone bills, school fees, activity fees, medical bills, etc. Also, remember to close your bank account if you opened one while on the program.

Take time to prepare your souvenirs, gifts, and luggage, as well to preserve special memories. Don't wait until the last minute to take photos of friends, places, and anything else you'll want to have pictures of. Sketch some memories. Write in your journal. Gather souvenirs and gifts to bring home and share with your family and friends. Call your airline or check online to find out how many bags you may bring with you on your flight and what the weight limits are for each bag. You may need to pay additional fees for oversized or overweight luggage. Use a bathroom scale to check if your luggage is overweight. If you have a lot of luggage, you might want to ship some of it home ahead of time. Do not make arrangements to leave extra items with your host family to ship home for you after you leave. Take care of this before your departure.

Plan your goodbyes. Give yourself time to say "Thank You" to your host family. Tell them what your life will be like in your home country when you return and about your favorite memories of life with them in America. Also, thank other people who made your stay special: your Community Representative, friends, teachers, etc. It is very important to say goodbye. This will help you leave behind what must be left and get ready for all that is ahead of you.

12.

PERSONAL NUMBERS & ADDRESSES

Host family phone: _____

Host family address: _____

Emergency contact for host family: _____

Student's cell phone: _____

Student's natural parent's phone (including country codes): _____

Student's home address: _____

Police: _____

Fire: _____

Ambulance: _____

Health insurance company phone: _____

School name and phone: _____

School guidance counselor name and phone: _____

Additional names and phone numbers: _____

13.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Resources section of the student or host family account entered through www.ayusa.org

- Student on-program forms and information
- Information regarding Ayusa events, contests, and Belo USA trips
- Department of State regulations and tax information
- Culture Grams and cultural guides
- Insurance information and claim forms

Speak with your Community Representative if you have any difficulty accessing this information.

studentinsurance@ayusa.org

Use this email to help answer questions and get help with insurance issues, as well as to send copies of bills, documents and receipts related to health and insurance issues.

Duo Lingo and other language apps

These free downloadable apps make it easier to learn a new language. This is a great resource to help a student get a better grasp on English, or for a host family to learn their student's language. Look for the "Online Resources for Improving Your English" handout within the Resources section of the student or host family account.

Useful Phrases:

Excuse me, where is the restroom?

I'm sorry, I don't understand. Would you please repeat that?

Please speak more slowly.

Would you mind saying that again with different (smaller) words?

Could you tell me how to get to...

Would you help me find my classroom?

Would you please explain this assignment to me?

Write down your own "Useful Phrases" list below!

14.

AYUSA HOST FAMILY CODE OF CONDUCT

Ayusa Host Family Code of Conduct

Ayusa's mission is to provide dynamic learning opportunities for future global leaders and world citizens for a future where people and nations celebrate similarities and accept differences. As their program sponsor, Ayusa is responsible for our participants' safety and wellbeing while they reside in the U.S. Ayusa takes this responsibility very seriously and is committed to ensuring all youth participating in our programs are protected and have a safe, healthy, supportive and positive environment in which to experience American high school and family life. We ask our host families to share our commitment to our participants and sign the Code of Conduct to insure the safety and wellbeing of the young people in our care.

Appropriate, positive interactions between host families and students are essential in ensuring a positive and rewarding program experience for everybody involved. They provide the caring connections that serve as protective factors for student and host families. Conversely, inappropriate or harmful interactions put Ayusa program participants at risk for adverse physical and emotional outcomes.

Per the Ayusa Code of Conduct, host families are expected to:

1. Adhere to the standards of appropriate behavior outlined below:

Verbal and Written Communication Considers all communication in person, via email, text messaging or social networking sites.

Appropriate

- Verbal praise
- Using encouraging, positive words in a pleasant / calm tone of voice
- Open and honest communication, including constructive feedback

Inappropriate

- Insults and name calling
- Using derogatory language regarding people who may look, think, or believe differently
- Bullying, swearing, yelling or other threats
- Sexually suggestive or degrading comments or jokes
- Intrusive questions and private conversations about personal /intimate matters
- Comments or compliments that relate to physique or body development
- Statements that can be taken as a proposition of any kind
- Discussing one's personal relationships and/or sex life
- Discussing intimate/sexual relationship of host parents

Physical Contact

Appropriate

- Allowing for and respecting personal space
- Pats on the back and shoulder
- Handshakes
- High fives and hand slapping
- Touching hands, shoulders and arms
- Brief, student-initiated hugs
- Touching due to medical emergency or protecting from physical harm

Inappropriate

- Corporal punishment
- Violent or aggressive behavior including, kicking, slapping, hitting or pushing
- Wrestling, tickling or rough housing
- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kisses on the mouth
- Student sitting on adult's lap
- Touching knees, legs, bottoms, chest or genital areas
- Showing any affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms or private rooms
- Sharing a bed with a student for any reason
- Any type of massage given by a student to an adult or an adult to a student
- Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear in any way
- Other touching behaviors that make a student uncomfortable

Other Behaviors

Appropriate

- Respecting student's privacy when changing clothes, using the bathroom or shower facilities, etc.
- Knocking before entering the student's bedroom
- Wearing appropriate attire that sufficiently covers private areas

Inappropriate

- Wearing no or insufficient clothing
- Excessive staring at or watching the student
- Having cameras in student's bedroom or bathroom facilities. This includes any device with a camera or recording capability. (For example: Amazon Echo Show and Google Nest Hub)
- Exposing the student to pornographic materials
- Exposing one's genitals to the student
- Providing mood altering substances including but not limited to alcoholic beverages, illegal drugs, and prescription drugs

Relationships

Appropriate

- Being a positive role model and parental figure
- Building relationships based on trust and open communication
- Empowering youth to express themselves and speak up about concerns
- Encourage students to make friends and engage with other people at school and host community

Inappropriate

- Favoritism and extensively giving gifts
- Spending excessive amounts of time alone with the student
- Isolating the student from social contact or communication with Ayusa or his/her natural parents
- Using the student as confidante
- Any kind of romantic (physical or non-physical) relationship

2. Conduct themselves responsibly and appropriately at all times during their interactions with the student/s they welcome into their homes. It is the adult's responsibility to set and respect boundaries. When a student attempts to involve a host family member in inappropriate behavior, the adult is responsible for redirecting the behavior, and reach out to Ayusa for intervention and support.

3. Do their part in preventing Ayusa students from being exposed to abusive and inappropriate behaviors by other adults or youth. This includes closely observing interactions of students with others and a commitment to recognize and respond to harmful behaviors.

4. Immediately report any sexual abuse and assault of an Ayusa student, or any suspicions or observations of inappropriate behaviors to Ayusa Headquarters (1-800-727-4540).

In case of an Ayusa host family member being in possible breach or breach of the Ayusa Code of Conduct, the following applies:

- The student/s will immediately be removed from the host home.
- As a mandatory reporter, Ayusa will report the incident to local authorities, the Department of Social Services and the U.S. Department of State.
- The host family will be deemed as ineligible to host with Ayusa in the future.

15.

HOST FAMILY ORIENTATION AGREEMENT

Thank you for hosting an Ayusa student! Please take a moment to review the information below. The purpose of this agreement is to fully inform host family members of their rights and responsibilities as an Ayusa host family. The signature page of this form indicates that you have read and understood the content of this agreement. Please keep this page for your records. Please feel free to contact your local Ayusa representative if you have any questions.

AGREEMENT: HOST FAMILY RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As an Ayusa host family, we confirm that:

- We have received a host family orientation, either online, in-person or both.
- We have received the Ayusa Participant Handbook.
- Ayusa has informed us that the U.S. Department of State Exchange Visitor Program Regulations (22 CFR Part 62) can be found on the host family portal on the Ayusa.org website.
- We have received the contact information of our local Ayusa representative, Regional Support Specialist, Regional Manager, and Ayusa's 24-hour emergency, toll-free telephone number 1-800-727-4540.

As an Ayusa host family, we have the right to:

- Expect an Ayusa student to become a member of our family including all rights and responsibilities that apply to any other family member.
- Be assigned a local Ayusa representative who will be in contact with us and the student at least once a month to monitor progress and assist with adjustment issues.
- Contact Ayusa if any questions or problems arise.

As an Ayusa host family, we agree to:

- Complete a criminal background check for all members of our household who are 18 and over as required by law.
- Provide prior notification to Ayusa of additional adult residents in our home, or a dependent turning 18 during the program year, so they can be vetted.
- Inform Ayusa of any changes affecting our family including but not limited to address, finances, employment, or if a family member is arrested.
- Provide a safe and supportive environment and treat the student as a member of our family.

- Ensure that a student is not left unsupervised overnight, but will always have a responsible adult 25 years of age or older providing supervision if parents are gone overnight.
- Provide the student with his/her own bed in a room that is not being shared by more than one other person of the same sex, and a space to study, and meets all local and state building codes.
- Provide the student with three meals per day including a lunch to take to school. If, however, the student chooses to buy a lunch at school, our family is not responsible for the costs.
- Ensure that the student has transportation to and from school.
- Facilitate the student's attendance at required Ayusa orientations.
- Ensure that Ayusa, as the sponsor of the student's program and responsible party, has access to the student at any time if deemed necessary by Ayusa.
- Ensure that our and our family have contact with our local Ayusa representative at least on a monthly basis, as required by U.S. Department of State Regulations, and be as flexible as possible in arranging time in our schedules and that of our student to meet or talk with our local Ayusa representative.
- Follow Ayusa student rules and program policies as outlined in the Participant Handbook.
- Assist the student in having a successful experience on program, and if difficulties arise, work with the student and our local Ayusa representative to help resolve these difficulties.
- Immediately notify our local Ayusa representative (or if s/he is not available, the Regional Support Specialist, Regional Manager, or Ayusa HQ) in any of the following events:
 - In case of an emergency, including but not limited to: serious illness, accidents (even if not injured), injury, or hospitalization of student or any household member; or disaster affecting the livability of the home (such as fire, storm or water damage);
 - Arrest or detention by authorities of student or any household member; or if any illegal activity by the student or any household member has transpired;
 - If it is known, suspected or alleged that the student has become a victim or witness of a sexual assault or any other act of violence or crime;
 - Student violation of Ayusa rules regarding driving, use of illegal substances, potentially harmful behavior including alcohol consumption.
- Notify our local Ayusa representative in a timely manner in any of the following events:
 - If our family and/or the student is away from home for more than 24 hours, providing the contact information in case of an emergency. For all overnight trips with our family that involve more than three overnight stays, a Request for Student Travel Form must be completed and given to our local representative.
 - If we learn that the student has had unexcused absences from school, has missed classes, or is having other academic problems.

- If the student is displaying signs of an eating disorder, depression, or other mental health disorder.
- If we are considering to host any other exchange student, even if only on a temporary basis, so Ayusa can obtain the required double placement approval from the U.S. Department of State and the student's natural parents.
- If contact from the natural family interferes with the student's adjustment process.
- If a natural family member proposes to visit the student during the program.

As an Ayusa host family, we understand that:

- An Ayusa student will come with spending money for optional activities or purchases during the exchange period.
- Students are provided with travel and accident insurance by a third party insurance company, and that coverage does contain limitations and exclusions such as self-inflicted injury, extreme sports, pre-existing conditions, injuries while operating any motorized vehicle, injuries sustained while riding as a passenger on a motorcycle, injuries sustained while in a private airplane or aircraft other than that of a major carrier.
- Ayusa is an academic program and students are required to attend school, complete assignments and abide by all school policies.
- We are not legal guardians of the student. We may sign forms for school related activities by crossing out the word "Parent/ Guardian" and writing in "Host Family" to make the relationship clear.
- Ayusa, as the sponsor of the student's program, is fully responsible for the student while s/he is staying in the U.S. Therefore, Ayusa has the authority to make decisions that are in the student's best interest.
- Ayusa has the sole responsibility for determining host family placements and has the authority to move the student if this is in his/her best interest and/or the interest of our family.
- Ayusa does not carry liability insurance for individual participants or host families and cannot be held responsible for claims for damages or injuries.
- Ayusa students must not share a bank account with our family. The student is responsible for covering their own phone bills that also must be set up separately from our family accounts. Ayusa cannot be held responsible for any outstanding account fees that result from accounts we set up for the student under our name.
- We cannot confiscate a student's personal property, including cell phones, computers, passport and DS 2019 form.
- Ayusa has a zero tolerance policy regarding any form of sexual or physical abuse committed by the student or any member of the host family.

Use of the Host Family's Name and Likeness:

Host Families, including all members regardless of age, consent and authorize Ayusa to use the family member's names, photographs, file or likeness of the family or any comments or statements of or by the family in materials or publications to promote the program. To ensure their comfort and consent, Ayusa will contact the host family in advance, when feasible, in cases where their likeness is used for media promotion.

————— NOTES —————

16.

HOST FAMILY ORIENTATION SIGNATURE PAGE

This signature page is to be signed by members of the host family in attendance at the orientation. Once signed, please remove it from the handbook and submit it to your Community Representative.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND SIGNATURE

I have read, understood, and will act in accordance with the Ayusa Host Family Orientation Agreement and Ayusa Code of Conduct.

HOST FAMILY NAME: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(Note: The Ayusa Host Family Rights & Responsibilities & Code of Conduct should be signed by all host family members 18 years or older present at the host family orientation. In cases where only one family member is present, s/he acknowledges that they are signing on behalf of all family members, present and otherwise, and agrees to provide them with a copy of the information contained herein.)

Instructions for Community Representatives: Please upload this signed form in the Position record.

DO NOT WRITE ON THIS PAGE

17.

CELL PHONE AND COMPUTER USE AGREEMENT

Please review and discuss these recommended rules for cell phone use and electronics—defined as computers, tablets, gaming consoles, and smart devices—with your student. You may adapt any of these guidelines to fit your household, and you are welcome to add additional rules or consequences as needed.

Rules

1. I will provide my own cell phone with an American phone number and plan either through my natural parents or myself. I understand that my host family should not add me to their plan.
2. I know that I am required to cover the cost of my cell phone plan and keep active for the duration of program.
3. My cell phone/computer and other electronics must be turned off at this time _____ on weeknights and at this time _____ on weekends. I can begin using my phone after this time each morning _____.
4. No calling/texting/electronics use during meals or family time (unless my host parents give permission).
5. Personal use of phone and/or electronics may be used after homework and chores are completed provided that it does not interfere with sleep, school, or program engagement.
6. If I'm asked to turn off my cell phone or computer, I must do so immediately. I understand not doing so can be considered an act of defiance and my actions may be grounds for disciplinary action.
7. When I'm out with friends I will always have my cell phone with me, charged, and 'on' so my host parents and Ayusa can reach me if needed. I will also keep adequate data service on it so they can reach me when needed.
8. I will not use my cell phone or electronics to take, send, or download pictures of nudity, violence or other inappropriate or unauthorized items.
9. I will not use my cell phone or electronics for malicious purposes (bullying, name calling, prank calling, posting negative information about anyone in my host family or community on social media, AI manipulation, etc.).
10. I will not illegally download or stream; music, movies, programs or games onto my cell phone or electronics or my host family's electronics or network services.
11. If my host family requests the use of location services such as Life360 or FindMy, etc., I will keep these services active at all times for the purposes of safety.

The consequences for not following through with these limits on my cell phone use are:

The host family will consult with the local Ayusa representative to discuss options such as counseling conversations, and in case of continued offenses, disciplinary steps with the Ayusa program.

Department of State regulations require that students are provided reasonable access to timely communications with their natural parents and family. Ayusa therefore does not sanction the confiscation of a student's cell phone or computer. However, temporary restrictions on the use of computers and cell phones as part of an individual host family's rules are acceptable – as long as within reason. To support the implementation of these rules, Ayusa suggests designating a location in a common area of the home where a student must store their cell phone or computer when not in use.

.....
Date/Host Parent Signature:

.....
Date/Student Signature:

18.

STUDENT ARRIVAL ORIENTATION AGREEMENT

Ayusa Student Arrival Orientation Agreement

Instructions for Student: Carefully read this Agreement, then sign and date it at the bottom of the document. Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the rules and regulations of the Ayusa International program. By signing this document, you agree, as an Ayusa student, to obey all rules for the duration of your stay in the USA.

Student Name _____

- I have read and understand the Ayusa Program Handbook. I have read and understand all the rules and regulations outlined in the Handbook, and understand I am responsible for obeying these rules. Failure to obey Ayusa regulations may result in my dismissal from the program, and an early return to my home country.
- I understand that Ayusa is responsible for selecting my host family during my time in the United States.
- I understand that my host family receives no monetary compensation for hosting, and their offer to host is a gesture of goodwill.
- I understand that I am subject to and will obey the laws of the land including all federal, state, local laws and school regulations. I will accept the decisions of my host school, host family, the Ayusa organization, and it's representatives.
- I understand that as Ayusa is an academic program, I must enroll in full-time classes and that my attendance at school is required. I also understand that because I am an international exchange visitor, graduation and/or a diploma, drivers education courses , and participation in sports are not guaranteed.
- I understand that I must maintain a minimum grade of 'C' in all of my classes, and if not, I must do whatever is necessary to improve my academic performance. This may include tutoring at my own expense. If I fail to maintain a 'C' in each of my classes, this may result in my dismissal from the Ayusa program.
- I understand that I am not allowed to drive any motorized vehicle while on the Ayusa program.
- I understand that I must never smoke, possess, or vape any type of nicotine or nicotine-related products, possess/ consume alcohol, or possess/ use illegal drugs.
- I understand that in case of any problems or concerns, I will **first** contact my Community Representative, Regional Support Specialist, or Ayusa headquarters.

- I have read and understand Ayusa's Travel Policy, which states that I cannot travel independently or travel to my home country while I am on program. I understand that I must complete the Travel Request Form for any travel with my host family involving three or more overnight stays, or any overnight travel away from the host community without the host family. I also understand that if I have received disciplinary action my request may be denied.
- I understand that my parents or close family friends can only visit for a short period of time, and may not visit prior to January 15th. I also understand that I am not allowed to travel with them while they are visiting, if it is during my program. If I would like to visit family or close family friends that live in the U.S., it also must be for a short period of time after January 15th. I understand that if I am a semester student I will only be able to experience these visits at the end of my program. I understand that if I have received disciplinary actions, my request may be denied.
- I understand that I must not share a bank account or a cell phone account with my host family. I understand that I am responsible for covering my own cell phone bills, as well as settling any outstanding medical bills, account fees, school charges and other account fees before returning to my home country at the end of the program.
- I understand that Ayusa does not carry liability insurance for individual participants or host families and cannot be held responsible for claims for damages or injuries.

Student Name

Orientation Facilitator

Student Email Address

Orientation Location

Student Signature and Date

Orientation Date

Instructions for Community Representative: Please upload this SAO Agreement in the Engagement record, and enter the Student Orientation Report under the PT Orientation tab in the Engagement record.

Student Arrival and School Information

Student Name _____

Who greeted you at the airport when you arrived at the host community?
Please check all that apply.

- Ayusa Representative
- Host Family
- Other:

What classes are you taking at school?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

What grade are you in at your school in the US?

9th

10th

11th

12th

What is your US cell phone number?

Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Important Documents

**Scan the below QR code for the
Ayusa Host Family Orientation and
Student Arrival Orientation
documents**



————— NOTES —————



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Ayusa International

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Ayusa International is a non-profit organization founded in 1981 to promote global learning and leadership through foreign exchange, study abroad and leadership programs for high school students from the U.S. and around the world. In addition, Ayusa administers the YES program, a grant program funded by the U.S. Department of State.

Ayusa is a sister company of Intrax, a family of organizations that provide a lifetime of high-quality educational, work and volunteer programs that connect people and cultures. Intrax is headquartered in San Francisco with offices in 6 countries.

USA Accreditation - In maintaining accreditation, Intrax is committed to quality and continuous assessment and improvement of our programs and services.



AMERICANCOUNCILS



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