

AYA Handbook for students



Your Guide to a Successful Year in the United States

Student Name: _____ Student ID: _____

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AYA Contact Information

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U.S. Department of State – Exchange Visitor Program
Email: jvisas@state.gov



Welcome to the United States of America!

You are about to begin a great adventure — exploring life in an American community, studying in a U.S. high school, and becoming a member of a new family.

You should be proud of your participation in the Academic Year in America (AYA) program. It takes courage to leave home and study in another country. The experience of studying abroad is not always fun; learning a new language and fitting into a new culture can be difficult. If you take the extra steps to participate fully in program activities, meet new people, get involved at school, and speak English, we promise you will grow in knowledge and maturity.

The purpose of this handbook is to help you as you begin this adventure and give you an idea of what to expect from U.S. culture and the AYA program. The handbook outlines important rules and guidelines that are your responsibility to follow while staying with your host family and attending school. Keep this handbook throughout your stay in the U.S.; you will find it a handy reference whenever you have a question. If you have a question that is not addressed in the handbook, please ask your Local Coordinator or host family or call your Student Support Specialist at the AYA National Office.

Remember... you are not alone. The AYA organization is here to help you resolve problems and make the most of your exchange experience in the U.S. By following the rules and participating in family, school, and community activities, you will gain skills that will enrich your life and change you forever.

Best wishes for a great year!

Michele Kabel
Director, Academic Year in America

The AIFS Foundation

The Academic Year in America (AYA) program has been in operation since 1981 and is conducted under the auspices of the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) Foundation.

The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit educational organization founded in 1967 with the assistance of the late Robert F. Kennedy. Its mission is to promote worldwide understanding through cross-cultural exchange.

In addition to sponsoring the AYA program, the AIFS Foundation awards grants to high schools for projects that encourage intercultural awareness. A board of trustees that includes

prominent educators and international business leaders governs the Foundation. The board meets regularly to review the effectiveness and quality of the Foundation's AYA program to ensure adherence to standards of excellence.

The Foundation has been designated by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) as an Exchange Visitor Program authorized to issue the Form DS-2019, which enables qualified participants to apply for a J-1 exchange visitor visa from the nearest U.S. Consulate or Embassy.

Our Mission

AYA's mission is to encourage and inspire young people to become considerate, forward-thinking citizens of the world by creating dynamic educational opportunities to share beliefs, ideologies, and values across cultures. We are committed to providing these experiences with an unrivaled commitment to the safety of our students.

The AYA Program

The AYA program has been developed for high school students ages 15 to 18, from all parts of the world, who wish to spend a semester or full academic year studying in the United States while living with an American family. AYA chooses carefully screened teenagers who have a demonstrated ability in the English language, a solid academic record, and a positive attitude to participate on our program. While participating on the AYA program, students will improve their English and share a rewarding cross-cultural exchange experience with their host families, schools, and communities.

AYA students arrive in August for the 10-month full academic year or for the 5-month fall semester program, or in January for the 5-month spring semester program.

The Goals of the AYA Program are to:

- Increase understanding of the United States and its people, culture, and history among young people all over the world
- Encourage Americans to learn more about foreign countries, cultures, and languages
- Create opportunities for cross-cultural friendships
- Provide a solid educational experience for all participants in the program
- Cultivate compassion and global citizenship through the exchange of culture and ideas
- Deliver programs that are superior from both experiential and administrative perspectives

Key Players

AYA has several key players that make our program successful:

Students from around the world apply to participate in the AYA program. AYA students:

- Are between the ages of 15 and 18, have a minimum of three years of English language study, a grade point average of C+ or better, and a passing score on an English language test
- Agree to adhere to the program rules
- Are fully insured and have their own spending money

Host families are **volunteers** of all ages, economic strata, and ethnic backgrounds. Host families have the following responsibilities:

- Provide the student with a safe and suitable home
- Welcome the student as a member of their family and encourage them to participate in all aspects of family life
- Provide the student with a bed, a quiet place to study, and a safe and stable home environment. Students may have their own bedroom or may share with one other host sibling of similar age and gender
- Provide the student with all meals. Students who wish to purchase hot lunch at school instead of taking a bagged lunch from home are responsible for purchasing lunch themselves
- Assist the student with school registration, if necessary
- Encourage the exchange of ideas, values and traditions through open and respectful dialogue and shared experiences at home and within the community

High schools, both private and public, accept our students.

- AYA students attend the local public high school serving the district in which their host family lives or a private school in the area
- Students enroll in full academic course loads and are encouraged to participate, whenever possible in activities such as band, sports, clubs, etc.
- Students must maintain a GPA equivalent to a C+ in all classes



Local Coordinators are the community representatives of the AYA program. They share a belief in the value of cross-cultural exchange. Local Coordinators are responsible for:

- Screening, interviewing, and selecting safe and suitable host families
- Enrolling students in local public or private high schools
- Providing host families with a pre-arrival orientation; providing students who do not attend AYA's national orientation with community orientation within two weeks of arrival
- Supervising and counseling families and students during the year; conducting face-to-face meetings and problem-solving
- Contacting both students and host families monthly via phone, email, video chat and/or in-person
- Informing the National Office of any concerns
- Completing and submitting monthly student reports to AYA
- Answering questions and providing emergency assistance
- Relocating students locally to other homes if necessary
- Taking a student into their own home in the event of an emergency

Second Visitors are Local Coordinators or designated Sponsor Representatives who are responsible for:

- Visiting the host family home to check on the quality of the home within 30–60 days of a student's arrival
- Second visitors are independent of the Local Coordinator who originally screened the home. These visitors serve as a 'second set of eyes', to confirm that the conditions of the home have not changed since the home interview

Regional Directors (RDs) are a team of individuals who place and support our students, host families and Local Coordinators. The Regional Director team consists of Placement Specialists and Student Support Specialists.

Placement Specialists work full time in our National Office. They are responsible for:

- Administering the program in their specific states and overseeing the placement process within their territory of states
- Supervising Local Coordinators and communicating with overseas partners
- Working with Local Coordinators to finalize school enrollments; facilitating communication regarding arrival and departure times and logistics
- Assisting with student support when needed

Student Support Specialists are designated AYA employees who work full time in the National Office. Their purpose is to:

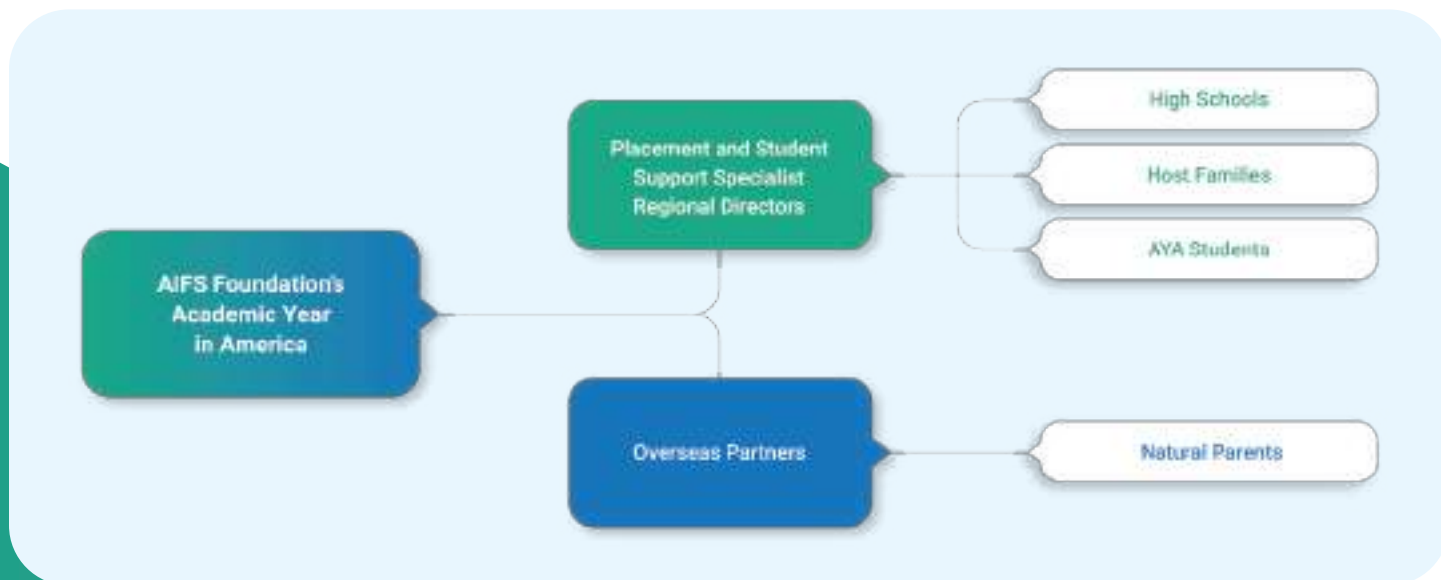
- Administer the program in specific states to provide on-program support for adjustment issues, rematch and the disciplinary process
- Provide outreach to students and serve as an additional outlet for students who need extra support or assistance in any way
- Review quarterly student surveys and supervision reports submitted by each student's Local Coordinator

Overseas Partners are responsible for the initial selection and screening of our students. The role of an overseas partner is to:

- Conduct personal interviews, administer English placement exams, and submit AYA applications
- Provide a pre-departure orientation and serve as liaisons to each student's natural parents during the program year
- Coordinate travel to and from the U.S.

AYA Organizational Chart

Our key players are shown on the AYA organizational chart below. We encourage the lines of communication to flow in this order. Please remember that host families are supported locally by the Local Coordinators and on a national level by the Student Support Specialists.



AYA National Office Support

A dedicated, professional staff in Stamford, Connecticut supports you, your host family, and your Local Coordinator. If you have questions or are experiencing a problem or conflict with your host family or Local Coordinator, call the AYA office at 800.322.4678 and ask for the Student Support Specialist assigned to your state.

Your Student Support Specialist can:

- Talk with you, your host family, and your Local Coordinator
- Communicate with the office in your home country
- Get information to natural parents
- Help you find a solution
- Act as a safe space for you to report any concerns directly

Please do not wait until you have a severe problem before calling your Local Coordinator or the AYA office. Sometimes, we do not hear about concerns host families and students have experienced until the end of the year, but the earlier you speak with our office, the better we can support you!

AYA Student Outreach

While your primary liaison to AYA will be your Local Coordinator, the AYA Student Support team will also be monitoring your progress and reaching out to you throughout the year in order to ensure that you are having a safe and rewarding experience.

You will receive 4 quarterly surveys throughout the year. Surveys will be sent to the email listed in your student application in September, December, March and May. It is imperative that you check your email frequently and respond to surveys. These surveys are another check-point and an opportunity for you to let us know how you are doing, ask questions and alert us if you are having a problem that has not yet been resolved. In addition to quarterly surveys, you will also receive regular email and/or text messages from AYA alerting you to important dates, cultural trends and news, as well as great advice on how to maximize your success in the U.S.! If you are not receiving our surveys or emails, please check your spam/junk filters. If you still aren't getting our messages, we may not have your correct email on file.

Many students open a new email account when they arrive to the U.S. **Please be sure to let your LC know if you have a new cell phone number or email address or would prefer to receive correspondence to an account other than the one listed on your student application.**

AYA encourages students to submit photos, stories and videos documenting their positive experiences and will often spotlight student stories on our blog or social media. We look forward to hearing from you and encourage you to reach out to our office anytime you have an issue, question or news to share!

Adjusting to Life in America

Communicating with Family and Friends Back Home

Email, phone, WhatsApp, Facetime, and social media sites can all be good ways for you to keep in touch with your family and friends back home. However, this type of communication with family and friends should be limited to a reasonable amount. Experience has shown that limited contact with your home country will minimize homesickness and maximize your exchange experience. If your host family and Local Coordinator suspect that frequent communication with friends and family members back home is hindering your adjustment, a counseling plan may be given to you where time on the internet or phone is limited until your adjustment improves.

Culture Shock

Even after your body has recuperated from switching time zones, there is a lot to get used to in a new country. Don't be worried if your first few weeks in the U.S. are a little unsettling. After the excitement quiets down, there can be a feeling of strangeness and isolation. It is so common that it has been given a name... culture shock!

What are the symptoms?

- Culture shock affects people in different ways. If you are experiencing any of the following feelings, you may be going through culture shock:
- Anxiety without any reason
- Feeling sleepy and exhausted all the time, even if you have had plenty of sleep
- Disorientation
- Self-doubt
- Nervousness
- Culture shock may set in many months after arrival

What can you do about it?

Don't hide your feelings.

Discuss them with your host family and friends, or your Local Coordinator. Talking with people you trust is one of the best things you can do when you are feeling down. Many students feel nervous, or even scared, and the best way to overcome that is to understand it and move forward with support.

Accept what is happening as normal.

Be patient and accept that culture shock is a normal part of your experience. Do not compare yourself to your peers or other exchange students and know that what you are feeling is temporary and with time you will feel better. Everyone adjusts to and experiences a new culture in their own unique way - if you are willing to go through it, you will get through it!

Be tolerant.

Even after being patient and open-minded, you may discover that there are customs in the United States that you just don't like. That is all right. You are here to learn and have a new experience, and you will experience both ups and downs. But be aware that Americans are proud people. Before you criticize the U.S., think of how you would feel if someone criticized your home country and its customs. Try to remember that things are different—not better or worse.

Speak English at home and at school.

Most students find it difficult to jump right in and speak English all the time. It's OK to ask your host family to slow down and speak more clearly or stop them if you don't understand the words they are using.

Speaking English in school may be challenging for you at first. While you can ask your host family to slow down when they talk, you cannot ask your teacher to stop their lecture and explain words you don't understand. You will have to concentrate hard at first to understand the material, but your English will continue to improve.

Often, students are tempted to speak their own language with other students from their home country. Please refrain from speaking your native language, especially around others who don't understand. It not only further isolates you, but also is considered rude.



Asking Questions

At school

Feel free to ask questions or request clarification you may need about the material during or after class. This will improve your English and will show your teachers you are a serious student. It is courteous to raise your hand before asking a question in class. After the teacher calls on you, ask your question. It is not necessary to stand to ask questions unless your teacher specifically instructs you to do so.

American students are encouraged, and often required, to participate in class discussions. Teachers are usually willing to stay after class and answer any questions you have or may be able to provide or arrange additional tutoring. If you are not sure what support is available to you - ask, ask, ask!

At home

At home with your host family, you should also ask questions when you don't understand something. Asking for clarification in the moment that you need it is very important and will greatly improve your ability to adjust to your new home. Your family may assume that you understand rules, expectations or the family dynamic in general - it is important that you let them know, respectfully, if you don't understand something to avoid ongoing miscommunications. Often students are embarrassed to admit they are confused, which can lead to prolonged and unnecessary discomfort for all involved.

Attitude of Gratitude

Your attitude is going to be one of the key contributors to a positive experience. When you encounter challenges, a positive mindset will tremendously improve your ability to respond to them productively. We know it's hard to always look on the bright side, but consistently focusing on the negative aspects of any experience can make a situation seem worse than it actually is.

Over the course of your experience, you may catch yourself being critical about something that is different from your home culture, or that you didn't expect. You may find that you are particularly negative or critical when you are homesick or struggling with cultural or language adjustments. This is a normal part of culture shock. Remember, the purpose of this exchange is to experience another culture. By keeping an open and positive mindset, you will learn to a greater extent, become more adaptable and recognize the value of the exchange experience. Be open to reevaluating and redefining your expectations based on your current experience. It's difficult to know what to expect before you arrive, and it will take time to adjust to the American way of life. Be patient with yourself and your host family!



Great Expectations

Many of the issues you encounter will be a result of unmet expectations and it's important to take time to consider whether those expectations are realistic or not. Lean on the guidance from your host family, Local Coordinator, and the AYA support team to rethink what you had pictured prior to coming on program, and how that may be impacting your initial experience. Successful placements are not always the ones that are problem-free. The deep connection and goodwill that develops through adaptation, negotiation, and respect for cultural differences will strengthen your relationship with your host family and help you grow as an individual.

It is important to remember that you are not the only one with expectations for this year. Your host family has their own expectations for you, and about how you will fit into their family. They will need to communicate and make adjustments when their expectations are not met as well.

Unmet expectations for both you and your host family can create frustration, which over time can create resentment and unhappiness. But by setting clear boundaries and guidelines, and listening to each other, you and your host family can reconcile these differences. Frustrations, disappointments, and adjustment are part of the process of learning to live together.

Below are some of the most typical expectations that can cause placement struggles when they are not met by either you or your host family, and steps you might take to adjust and resolve these concerns.

The location you are placed in may be smaller and more rural than you are accustomed to or expected. Effective ways to resolve this issue are:

- Ask your family what activities they like to participate in around their town.
- Involve yourself in school activities and events. In small towns, and with most American teens, a lot of the social activities revolve around local high schools.

Your host family may have more rules than you are used to. For example, many American families expect their own children to participate in household chores and abide by a curfew. Effective ways to deal with this adjustment include:

- Remind yourself that as a member of your host family, you will be treated as such. This includes following the host family rules and the responsibility to participate in chores, if asked by your host family. These rules are not just for you to follow; they also apply to other members of the household.
- Ask your host family if they can develop a rotating chore schedule. This is a good way to feel involved in the decision-making process.
- Host family rules such as curfews or asking for permission before going out are part of American culture. These rules are essentially cultural differences that will most likely not be negotiated and are easy to follow so long as you ask, tell, and stay on time. Remember: your safety is a top priority for your host family and AYA. Abiding by these rules is a way that we can all help ensure your safety while on the program.

Whether you have American host siblings or are in a double placement with another AYA student, you may encounter some normal teen sibling rivalries. Effective ways to resolve this issue are to:

- Communicate early and often. Talk to your host sibling about what is bothering you. There may be cultural differences that surprise you, or you may find that simply telling your host sibling how you feel will resolve the issue. If you need help coming up with solutions to a conflict, be sure to reach out to your host parents, your LC or your AYA Student Support Specialist. Don't wait too long before reporting an issue; the sooner it's addressed the sooner it will be resolved!
- Talk to your host family, Local Coordinator, or an AYA student support staff member about some of your concerns. They may be able to provide you and your host brother/sister with ways to improve your relationship and/or decrease the number of issues you are having.
- Try to remind yourself of all the positives of living with another person. You and your host sibling are learning a lot about communication, sharing, and respecting a different culture and lifestyle.
- Remember that your host siblings are just that, host siblings. You should expect to have a sibling relationship with them, but not necessarily to be their best friend. While some exchange students share friends with their host siblings, many of them have their own network of close friends separate from their family. In either case, it is important to focus on all the positive aspects of your relationship!

You were hoping that your host family would eat together as a family and cook meals that you eat at home. The food your host family cooks, and their general eating habits, may be different from the foods you are accustomed to. For example, if you are a vegetarian, you may find it difficult to find food in your host family's home that you like and are able to eat. You may also discover that your host family has a very busy schedule and only eats together on weekends. Effective ways to handle this adjustment include:

- Communicate with your host family about what your diet normally consists of back home and work with them to find compromises and ways to include your meals of choice into their daily diet if possible.
- If you are accustomed to eating certain snacks, take it upon yourself to purchase these snacks. Your host family is responsible for providing you with three meals a day. They are not responsible for providing you with your favorite snacks.
- Offer to cook occasionally for your host family—or provide your host family with some recipes that you enjoy back home. This is a great way to expose your host family to an aspect of your culture while also bringing a taste of home to your American experience.
- Talk to your host family about your interest in eating together as a family; they may be able to schedule more family dinners or come up with a more consistent schedule. If not, you can find ways to spend more time together and focus on enjoying the meals you do share together.



The activities that your host family participates in are different from what you expected and don't interest you. As a result, you choose not to participate in them. Your host family may perceive that you are isolating yourself and may be disappointed or hurt by your actions. Effective ways to prevent this from happening include:

- Be open-minded to these activities, try to keep an open mind and try things more than once! A large part of building a relationship with your host family is to be as involved as you can in their daily lives. They are giving you the opportunity to be a part of their family traditions; for example, if they spend one night a week playing board games, join in!
- Suggest activities that you and your natural family normally do at home. Remember, this is an exchange program, and your host family is also expecting to learn from you, your culture, and your family traditions as well!
- Spend time with your host family when you are home with them. Don't spend all your time in your room. Even if you do not share all the same interests and hobbies, you will learn a lot and build a strong relationship just by spending time in the same room as them. Join in meal preparation or sit with them when they are watching TV; initiate games or activities that you can do at home together!

You are experiencing more homesickness than you were anticipating. As a result, you are spending a lot of time on the computer or phone speaking to your natural family and friends with the hope that it will ease the homesickness. Your host family might feel hurt by this or feel that you do not want to spend time with them. Effective ways to prevent this from happening include:

- Limit communication with natural family and friends when you're feeling homesick. Believe it or not, limiting contact with family and friends will actually help you get over homesickness more quickly. Constantly checking in with the people back home will only intensify your homesickness and concern that you are missing out on something in your home country. Likewise, limiting contact can also help your host family recognize that you are not intentionally ignoring them and shows that you have an interest in getting to know them.
- Be open with your host family and Local Coordinator about your feelings. Expressing these feelings will not only help you but also prevent your host family from misinterpreting your homesickness and thinking that you are deliberately isolating yourself.
- Get busy! Join clubs, sports or any other opportunities that distract you during this initial adjustment period. Even if your school doesn't have any activities that you think you will like, try something new – you won't know if you like something until you try it!
- Take time to do things that you love and that bring you joy. This is an opportunity to practice self-care and focus on something fun or peaceful. Write in a journal, listen to a funny podcast, draw, play music, or go for a long walk.

Problem-Solving

AYA Expectations Worksheet

AYA has created a detailed Expectations Worksheet designed to help you and your host family establish clear understanding about everything ranging from meal-time and laundry protocols to dating and curfew. This worksheet is really important and should be completed within 72 hours of arrival. It is important that you and your family complete each section together and ask for clarification if anything is confusing or unclear. We have found that families and students who complete the expectations worksheet together and soon after arrival, have fewer communication and adjustment issues. A copy of the worksheet is available at the back of your workbook.

The only way to solve problems is to talk about them. Open communication is key. It may be difficult for you to tell your host family that something is bothering you. You may be afraid that you will hurt their feelings. However, think of how much worse they will feel if you let these little problems grow and finally decide that you cannot live with them any longer or vice versa. Take the opportunity to talk about problems when they occur.

Many students' first instinct is to call their parents at home. It is important to follow the chain of communication on page 4. Your host family, Local Coordinator, and AYA can help you solve the problem more quickly than your natural parents, who are far away; they will only worry about you. The longer you wait to talk to your host family, Local Coordinator, and AYA, the more you may prolong your problem.

If you feel like you can't talk to your host family about your concern, contact your Local Coordinator immediately—they are there to assist you in resolving these problems, no matter how big or small. If for any reason you cannot reach your LC or do not feel comfortable discussing a particular issue with them, you can always call your Student Support Specialist or a member of the AYA student support team. We are here to help you and guide you through this experience.

When you have a problem

1. Talk with your host family FIRST.

If it's not solved or you want to talk to someone before addressing it with your host family,

2. Call your Local Coordinator, who can:

- Listen
- Advise
- Help you communicate with your host family
- Arrange a student/family conference or Face-to-Face meeting
- Call the AYA National Office

Still have problems?

3. Call the AYA National Office at 1.800.322.4678. You can request to speak to your Student Support Specialist or the AYA's Director of Student Services. If you must leave a message, please leave your first and last name, what state you are calling from, and the best phone number to reach you. You can also email the AYA student support team anytime at ayainfo@aifs.org. You can find your Student Support Specialist's contact information online by visiting: AcademicYear.org/lc_com/directory.asp

The AYA office will:

Listen to your concerns and help you work through them. AYA Support Staff will help counsel you and will reach out to all appropriate parties, including your sponsoring organization in your home country, who will also update your parents.

Between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time):

Ask to speak with your Student Support Specialist, who is responsible for the state in which you live.

After office hours:

If it is an emergency (something that cannot wait until the next business day, such as a medical emergency), please follow the directions on the recorded phone message and leave your full name, student ID #, telephone number with area code, and the reason for your call with the Emergency Service. An AYA staff member will then call you back.

If it's not an emergency, leave your name and full phone number, and your Student Support Specialist will contact you when office hours resume.

Remember...Your host family and Local Coordinator are there for you to talk over any problems, and the AYA organization is only a phone call away! There is always someone here to speak with, 24 hours a day.



What happens after I report a problem?

If you and your family are experiencing any of the challenges described above, the following steps will be taken to begin the counseling process.

Face-to-Face Communication: Your Local Coordinator will schedule a meeting to discuss any issues affecting your placement. This meeting can be requested by you, your host family, your Local Coordinator, or the AYA National Office if appropriate. The purpose of a face-to-face meeting is to allow all parties to come together and speak freely, without fear or judgment, about their concerns. The Local Coordinator will be there to help ensure that you and your host family are clearly understanding each other. They will ensure that both sides have the opportunity to be heard, will summarize the issues, and keep the conversation respectful and productive.

Action Plan: Once you and your host family have had the opportunity to honestly communicate with each other, your LC will help you all come up with an action plan to address the issues. Depending on the situation, you may each come up with concrete suggestions on specific actions that each of you will take to improve the situation and avoid having it happen again.

Follow-up plan: Your Local Coordinator will establish a follow-up plan to check on you and your host family after a certain date. This will allow you and your host family time to implement the steps you have agreed upon and provide feedback. If problems persist, you may need to sit down again and come up with alternative solutions.

Keep in mind that during the counseling process, all parties must be respectful and courteous to one another. Remember, your host family also had expectations and may be disappointed or frustrated by this experience as well.

Host Family Changes

When you first arrive:

It is important to know that it can take 3 months or more to feel comfortable in your new environment. Try to be patient and allow yourself enough time to build relationships with your host family and get integrated into your host school and community. You may be tempted to request a host family change early on in your experience, however, experience has shown us that if you put the time and effort into communicating and working through adjustment issues, you can overcome these early feelings of discomfort and have a rewarding experience.

In the first weeks of adjustment, students often compare their experiences with other exchange students online - you may be hearing about exciting experiences other students are having or seeing images of more idealized "stereotypical" host families and homes on social media. Please understand that comparing your experience to anyone else is the surest way to ruin your experience. Consider that most people only post the best version of themselves and their experiences on social media - everyone struggles with adjustment from time to time. The best thing you can do is communicate, remain open to your current experience and fully integrate yourself into your family, school and community. It is up to you to make the most of your time on program!

Only if all other corrective counseling measures have failed will a host family change be considered. If, after going through the appropriate counseling steps, AYA feels that there is an irreconcilable difference or a genuine compatibility issue, your Local Coordinator will make every effort to place you with a new family within the same community and high school. Only rarely will a student be required to move to a new school or state.

You are expected to make a concerted effort to adjust to your host family. You will not be moved based on a dislike of your location, high school, style of housing, or host family. You must adjust to the community and high school that you were originally placed in. The majority of AYA students are placed in rural communities and/or small high schools. Unless there is a verified safety concern, you are expected to stay with your assigned host family. You may not change host families at will or without explicit permission from the AYA National Office. This is a safety precaution to ensure that AYA knows where you are at all times and has appropriately screened and vetted your host family.

The willingness factor - being willing to work on relationships and through discomfort - is critical to your success and adjustment. You must remain open to the processes that are in place to help you adjust to your new environment.





Important:

Under no circumstances should a student distort or misrepresent their placement circumstances or housing situation to expedite a host family change. Except in the case of a true emergency or safety concern, you may not share information about your host family with people outside of the AYA chain of communication. Sharing pictures or video or any personal information about your host family with other individuals via phone, text, email, social platforms, etc. is strictly prohibited and a violation of your host family's privacy and will result in disciplinary action. **Students who are not willing to make a sincere good-faith effort to participate in the counseling process, violate a host family's privacy, and/or misrepresent information to change families will be subject to serious disciplinary action up to and including disqualification.**

Cultural Differences

Dealing with cultural differences is part of the challenge of the exchange program. Throughout the year, and especially at the beginning, we encourage students and host families to keep cultural differences in mind. What may seem like a conflict or incompatibility is often a misunderstood or unacknowledged cultural difference. For example, in some cultures arriving a few minutes late to an event or to dinner is normal and completely acceptable. Americans, by contrast, generally value punctuality and consider being late rude. If both parties fail to recognize that this is a cultural difference rather than the student being disrespectful or the host family making unreasonable demands, then the issue can be easily resolved through communication, planning, and better understanding.

Gratitude

Openly expressing gratitude and appreciation is very important to Americans and may be even more important in certain parts of the country, like the South. To Americans saying "please" and "thank you" demonstrate appreciation and respect to those around them. Whether someone has opened a door for you, helped you find a classroom at school, cooked dinner for you or gave you a ride home, a "thank you" is usually in order. Americans are habitual "thankers"; they express gratitude in many daily, ordinary situations that people from other cultures may not. It is important to know and practice this throughout your experience. It is so ingrained in American culture that many Americans may not even realize that other cultures do not express gratitude in the same way; they may even think the other person doesn't like them - which is usually not the case! Find ways to practice gratitude and show your host family and friends how much you value their support and friendship.

Cultural Iceberg

An iceberg is a common analogy used to explain the complexity of culture. Cultural differences can be very straightforward, such as language and food, but other differences take time to identify. It is the differences that are “below the surface” that can sometimes cause issues between students and host families. A good example of this is style of communication. Americans tend to be very polite and diplomatic in our communication. Generally, we say what we mean, but we try to find the nicest way possible to say it. By comparison, German communication style is very direct and to the point, which can be interpreted as abrupt or even rude by American standards.

When welcoming a student into your home, we urge host families to learn about their student’s home country and culture to help identify cultural differences and take them into consideration throughout the adjustment cycle. As hosts it is important to try to identify what is ‘below the surface’ as you get to know your student and develop an understanding of what cultural values and norms might be influencing their behavior, communication style, or attitudes. Likewise, it is important to consider your own values and cultural norms, and how they might influence your interactions with your exchange student. Always remember, when it comes to other cultures, it’s not better or worse, it’s just different!



Mobile Phones

The easiest way to make phone calls in the U.S. is by using platforms that support Wi-Fi calling like WhatsApp or Facetime. Many Americans no longer have a “landline” otherwise known as a separate telephone that is hardwired in their house. This means that most students will communicate using a personal cell phone. If you are using a cell phone to call or text with your natural family, make sure that you know exactly what your phone plan covers. Remember that these plans may be costly, and you will be responsible for paying for any calls you make using your cell phone, or a cell phone provided to you by your host family.

Please be aware that you are responsible for paying for your own cell phone and monthly bill. Some host families may be able to add students to a family plan - if this is the case, please be aware that you will need to pay your portion of the bill and that you will need to settle any outstanding balances prior to leaving their home. It is also important to note that just because you have your own cell phone, that does not mean that you may talk or text with friends and family any time you wish; be mindful of your host family's rules regarding cell phone use and texting, and be aware that you may receive a disciplinary notice if you are not abiding by their guidelines.

When calling home, remember that there is a time difference. The U.S. has four time zones (Eastern, Central, Mountain, and Pacific), depending on where you are. Make sure you take this into account, or you'll risk waking up the person you are calling! If you intend to pay for the call yourself, you will need the international dialing code: 011 + your country code + local code (minus the zero) + the number.

If you're making a phone call from a friend's phone or your host family's phone, make sure you pay them for the call. A record of every call that is made from a private phone will appear on the phone bill.

Note: The main distinction between the phone system in the U.S. and those elsewhere is that they use a number and letter system. Many phone numbers will use words, for example, 1.800.72.PIZZA. All phone numbers have an area code (3 digits), an exchange code (3 digits), and a number (4 digits). Examples of toll-free exchanges in the U.S. are 1-800, 1-888, 1-877, and 1-866. Do not call 1-900 numbers which, may cost you upwards of \$5 per minute.

Food

Dietary Restrictions and Preferences

If you are vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free or have any other dietary restrictions that preclude you from eating certain foods or require special preparation, you will be asked to be creative, flexible and proactive at sourcing appropriate foods and preparing suitable meals for yourself when necessary. Students with special dietary restrictions or preferences should have access to additional money for food items that are not regularly purchased by the host family. This includes special snacks, specific fruits, organic foods, and other items that the family would not normally purchase for themselves. If your dietary restrictions/preferences were listed on your application, your host family will be aware of them, but it's unlikely that they will share similar dietary practice and they will most likely be inexperienced at shopping for and preparing meals for your specific dietary needs. Your host family will, however, be prepared to be welcoming, flexible and open to make some changes to the way they cook and shop so that you have nutritious options at mealtimes.

If your dietary practices have changed since the time of your application, you need to let your home-country agency and Local Coordinator know immediately, and preferably prior to arriving. If you choose to adopt a new diet while on-program there is no guarantee that your host family will be willing to accommodate you.

Eating Habits

It's important to remember that one of the symptoms of culture shock is a change in eating habits (eating more or less than usual). Be mindful and do your best to maintain a healthy and balanced diet, along with a healthy perspective on weight loss or gain. Many exchange students fear that they will gain weight on the program; while we encourage you to make good nutritional choices, it's important to be flexible and not let this fear diminish your experience or your willingness to try new things. Most students find that if there are fluctuations in their weight when they first arrive, after being in the U.S. for a few months they eventually balance out! However, if you are concerned about your weight loss or gain, please discuss it with your host family or your Local Coordinator so that they can help you find healthy ways to address your diet.

Meal Time and Food Preparation

Every American family prepares and deals with mealtime differently. Some families eat together every night and will insist that you join them and actively participate in dinner time conversations. Conversely, depending on your family's lifestyle or schedule, you may be asked to warm up your own dinner occasionally, or you may find that your family eats separately due to busy schedules. You may find that your host family orders take-out or eats out more than you are accustomed to - that's all part of the experience. If you would like more home-cooked meals, talk to your host family about it. It is also helpful to note that many American families do not eat a formal breakfast together; students are often surprised to learn that they will be responsible for preparing their own breakfast (e.g., making toast or grabbing a bowl of cereal) before they head out to school.

High School

Successful participation at an American high school is every bit as important as being part of an American family. . You will discover a lot about the United States and about yourself at school. Attending a new school in a foreign country, communicating all day in a foreign language, and experiencing a dozen different ways of doing things can be overwhelming. If possible, spend a few hours with your host family visiting the school before it opens. Introduce yourself to the principal and to your guidance counselor. The guidance counselor may be a good resource for any school related concerns throughout the academic year.

It is important to take academics seriously. This year may not count for academic credit at home, but AYA requires that you achieve at least a “C+” average in all classes, and that you demonstrate a positive attitude in school as well. If you are expelled from school, you will be disqualified from the AYA program. If you receive a suspension, AYA will evaluate the situation and take appropriate disciplinary action. Please contact your Local Coordinator if you are experiencing any problems at school.

AYA does not guarantee grade assignment, receipt of a diploma, or participation in graduation ceremonies to any of its students. You or your host family should not pressure a school to place you in a particular grade, to take specific classes, or to allow you to graduate. You can be issued an Advisory Letter or be placed on probation if you continually ask school personnel to modify your schedule, change your grade placement, or graduate.

We encourage students to take advantage of every available opportunity offered at school. This might include participating in sports, clubs, music, etc. AYA is not, however, able to guarantee that you will be able to play sports at school; every school has their own policy regarding exchange student participation in sports, and they reserve the discretion to allow or refuse participation at any time. If you are not able to play your sport of choice, we encourage you to explore other sports or clubs that might be available outside of school. There are many opportunities to get involved in high school, playing sports is just one small part of the school experience - we encourage you to join clubs, participate in student government and seek creative ways to get involved. Many AYA students who were unable to play sports were able to join the team as a student “manager.” This allowed them to make new friends and still feel like part of the team.

What if I don't like my school?

Depending on where you are enrolled, your American high school may be very different from your high school back home. It may be much smaller, or much bigger. You may find it difficult to adapt to the teaching style at first or navigate the layout of the school. Feeling overwhelmed or frustrated is a normal part of the adjustment period and will require patience and effort on your part to adjust. Students can become frustrated when they maintain expectations about how they envisioned their American high school experience would be. It is important to try new things and find creative ways to take advantage of the opportunities that are available to you. Please remember that students may not change schools due to the size or demographics of the student body. It is up to you to make the most of your American experience and

adapt to the high school and community you are placed in. Your local coordinator, host family and AYA all want you to succeed and will help you find ways to navigate and overcome challenges! It is most important that you remain open to suggestions and understand that your attitude and effort will determine your satisfaction on this program.

Convalidation:

Depending on the requirements of your school at home, you may need to receive credit for the courses that you take while on-program. Students who are required to transfer credits, for example students from Spain, Brazil or Italy, should be aware of the specific course requirements when they register for school. It is your responsibility, not the responsibility of your LC or AYA, to manage this process and ensure that it is completed before you leave the United States. We recommend that you contact your overseas sponsoring organization for a copy of your convalidation procedure that will pertain to your country's requirements. AYA does not guarantee convalidation. If you withdraw from or are dismissed from the program early, you may not be able to convalidate your transcripts.

Social Media and Social Life

While social media can be a great way to connect with friends and family and share your experiences, when used carelessly it can also be damaging and dangerous. As long as you are on the AYA program, you reflect our program and are an ambassador of your country. Your actions must reflect the highest standards of behavioral and program expectations. Please avoid making any posts or posting any photos of yourself that portray you in a compromising manner or that reflect poorly on your abilities to make sound decisions. It is all too easy for photos and captions to be viewed in a negative way or as a negative representation of yourself and your role as an AYA student.

It is important to be mindful of your digital footprint. What you post online can be viewed publicly and even posts or messages that you think are 'private' can be accessed, saved and/or shared, sometimes without your consent. Your digital footprint will follow you well beyond your time on the program and may be searched or viewed for years to come. Posts that you feel are “jokes” can be misinterpreted, and it is very easy for your posts to be perceived as inappropriate or culturally insensitive. Think carefully about what you are doing online and always err on the side of caution. If there's even the slightest possibility that your activity could be considered inappropriate or inconsiderate - don't do it!

Be mindful of who you befriend on social networking sites. Their posts can be connected to you and can negatively impact you or cast doubt on your ability to use good judgment when choosing the people and friends with whom you associate. Some other social media guidelines to follow include:

- Be very careful if making comments about your host family, your LC, or AYA. Keep things positive
- Avoid making passive-aggressive comments about peers or family that could be misinterpreted
- Do not post pictures of yourself making inappropriate gestures, dressing provocatively, etc.

- Do not share controversial political or social photos that might be interpreted as supporting a cause that contradicts your personal values
- Do not use expletives or inappropriate language

Feel free to contact your Local Coordinator, host family, or an AYA staff member if you are unsure about what is appropriate or not for social media usage, or if you want more guidelines in regard to social media use.

Social Life

Most AYA students are somewhat shy when they begin school, and it might not be easy to meet new people or make friends during the first few weeks of class. This shyness is completely understandable and a normal part of the adjustment process.

Try not to spend time exclusively with other foreign students, especially if you share the same native language. If you are willing to get involved in clubs, sports, youth group or other community, youth-based activities you will have the opportunity to meet and connect with American students and you will develop a wide circle of friends in your high school. It will be easier to make close, meaningful friendships later if you expose yourself to a variety of people and activities at the beginning and throughout the year. It is easier to meet people and make friends if you share a common interest in a club or sport.

When invited to social events, make sure that you provide your host family with the names and phone numbers of the friends who will be hosting the get-togethers and confirm that there will be appropriate supervision. If your host family requires any more information prior to giving permission for you to attend the event, please provide them with this information in a timely and respectful manner.

Keep in mind that while socializing and meeting new friends is an important part of your experience, it should not be the main focus of your experience. Make sure that you find a nice balance of time to spend with both your friends and your host family.

Group Outings

This custom is popular throughout the world. Rather than going out with one particular person, a whole group of friends decides to do something together—see a movie, go swimming, or go out to eat. Often, it's not necessary to wait for a specific invitation; you may go if you want. Just ask where the group is going, what time they will be there, and if you can come along. This might seem a little awkward at first, but it will be worth it. Someone has to make the first move - it might as well be you!

Dates

Your host family may have rules that prohibit or limit one-on-one dating. AYA highly discourages our students from engaging in a relationship or having a “boyfriend” or “girlfriend” while on the program. Dating is not why you came on this program and getting involved in a romantic relationship often hinders or derails an otherwise positive experience by narrowing your focus, your group of friends, and your ability to experience a wide range of activities. Host families are not required to allow you to date, and you must abide by your host family's guidelines at all times.

Sexual Activity

Sexual intercourse of any kind is prohibited while you are on the AYA program. AYA encourages you to act responsibly and conservatively regarding sex and dating. Becoming romantically involved should not be your focus or priority while on program. Engaging in sexual behavior may result in disciplinary action, including early dismissal from the program. U.S. law also states that persons over the age of 18 are not permitted to engage in sexual activity with any minor (persons 18 years or younger). Likewise, minors (persons 17 years old and younger) may not engage in sexual activity with anyone who is 18 years or older. While in many countries it may not be considered inappropriate for a high school student to have a relationship with someone over the age of 18, in the U.S. it raises serious legal and ethical concerns. Even when consensual, a person having sex with a minor may be subject to legal prosecution.

Important information for 18-year-old students while in the U.S.

Some students will already be 18 years old when they arrive, and some may turn 18 during the school year. Being 18 years old in the United States means that you are legally considered an adult and will be treated as such within the American judicial system. It is imperative for students who are 18 to know that if they are suspected, accused or charged with a criminal offense, they may be treated and tried as an adult. This means the consequences are often far more serious than they would be in the juvenile court system, and could include fines, jail time, or in some cases the requirement to register as a sex offender. This information is not intended to frighten you, but to make you aware so that you take special care to avoid any of these situations. We have listed below a few laws in the U.S. that 18 year old students should be aware of:

Engaging in sexual activity with a minor

Most states in the U.S. have laws that consider the legal age of consent, with regards to sexual activity between minors (people who are under the age of 18) and persons over the age of 18, who are considered adults. It is illegal for 18 year old to interact sexually with anyone under the age of consent, which can range from a person who is 15-18 years old, depending on the state. Even if the relationship is consensual between an 18 year old and a younger high school student, criminal charges can still be filed by the state against the adult in question. The rules and laws vary by state and could in some cases apply to 17 year olds.

Requesting, sending, receiving or exchanging photos or text messages of a sexual nature with a minor may constitute grounds for legal action. Students under the age of 18 should also be reminded that sending explicit messages or photos to anyone who is legally defined as an adult may have serious legal implications for the adult.

For the reasons stated above, along with general safety precautions, AYA discourages all students from engaging in sexual relationships, and prohibits all forms of sexual intercourse and exchange of explicit photographs or messages while on program. Our rules are in place to protect you and ensure that you have a safe and rewarding program.

Breaking a U.S. or State law

If you are arrested as an 18 year-old, authorities are not required to contact your parents or host family. You are considered an adult and responsible for yourself. If you are in a position where you may be questioned by authorities, like the police, it is important to keep in mind that one of your rights in the U.S., is to have an attorney present before you answer any questions about a particular charge or investigation. If you choose to answer questions without an attorney present, anything you say could be used as evidence against you in a court of law. You should always be respectful and polite when speaking with authorities.

Regardless of your age, you are still a participant on the AYA program and will need to comply with the AYA Student Code of Contact and Program Rules. We expect all students to demonstrate sound judgement and make decisions with their safety and wellbeing, as well as the safety and wellbeing of others, in mind.

Parties, Drugs, and Alcohol

Parties can be formal or informal. They are usually held at a student's home or through a school-run activity. Be proactive in using sound judgment as you attend both school-sponsored events and events you are invited to by friends. You may find yourself in situations that can be potentially risky and dangerous. These situations include, but are not limited to, underage drinking, drug use, getting into a car with a drunk driver, etc. If you find yourself at a party where alcohol and/or drugs are being used, you should leave the party immediately. Failure to leave a party where drugs or under-aged drinking are present or getting into a car with an impaired or unlicensed driver are considered a serious safety concerns and demonstrate poor judgment and may lead

to serious disciplinary action including early dismissal. Possession, use and/or intent to use or distribute alcohol or other illicit substances is grounds for immediate disqualification. If you are suspected of using or procuring drugs or alcohol, you may be required to submit to a drug test at your own expense. If a student is not willing to take a test, they will have the option to withdraw from the program voluntarily or will be subject to an AYA disciplinary meeting for disqualification. Be mindful of what you say to your friends and peers and how you represent yourself on social media and text messages. Please remember that anything you put into writing can be seen by others, even if you think your interactions are private.

Loss of Independence

You may find that you are more limited in what you can and cannot do socially with your friends while you are in the U.S. Teenage behavior in America may be more conservative than you are used to in your home country. You will be expected to ask permission from your host parents to go anywhere and check in frequently as well as when plans change. Many students take this close monitoring as a sign that their host family doesn't trust them, but this is not the case. **Your host family has been tasked with the responsibility of keeping you safe, and that is a responsibility that they should and do take very seriously. It is critical that you always follow your host family's rules and ensure that they approve of and know where you are at all times.**

Likewise, you may find that you must rely on your host family and friends to go anywhere. Most students are placed in rural America, where there is limited or no public transportation. This may be frustrating for a student who is used to hopping on a bus or metro in their home country. It is important to understand that this is the norm in the U.S. and that you will be required to plan



in advance and arrange carpools and rides when you want to go somewhere. It is important to give your host family proper notice when you will need a ride and to ask them for permission. Never assume that someone is going to be able to give you a ride; due to busy schedules and lifestyles, most parents and teenagers need at least 48 hours prior notice

Friends

Making friends is not always easy. It takes time, and it requires being outgoing and friendly. Exchange students sometimes stand and wait—wait for someone to ask them to sit with them at lunch, to invite them to the movies, to participate in homecoming preparations. This is generally not a realistic expectation—in most cases, you, as the exchange student, will need to take the first step in initiating friendships. Here are some tips on how to take the first step:

- Join school clubs or sports teams; they are great ways to meet different groups of people.
- Ask your school guidance counselor to assign you a buddy for your first week or so on the program. This is a great way to connect with someone and be shown around the school, so you can become more comfortable with the grounds and people.
- In the school cafeteria (lunch room), ask a student or small group of students if you can sit with them at lunch. They will probably say yes, and this is a great way to meet new friends.
- Smile and show your friendliness. Believe it or not, American students are just as nervous to meet you as you are to meet them!
- Take the first step and ask other students about (positive!) things you noticed about their culture. Let them know that you would like to learn more about it.

- Attend as many school events (plays, musicals, sporting events) as you can. It's a great way to involve yourself in your school community. A lot of American teenagers' social lives revolve around high school events and activities.
- **Try to remember that the friendships you form in America will be different from the ones you have back home. Adjusting your expectations can help prevent you from feeling disappointed about the friendships you create while on the program and help you appreciate the differences in these friendship dynamics.**

You also need to remember that some American high school students may not be very informed about what's going on in other parts of the world. Some students may not express appreciation for different cultures due to lack of exposure. You may be shocked by some of the questions your new friends ask. Remember, one of the reasons U.S. high schools enroll exchange students is to enhance their own student body by exposing American students to other views, languages, and cultures.

Be sure you understand your family's rules about inviting friends over, visiting friends' homes, and riding in cars with friends. You must follow your family guidelines and use sound judgment when making friends and joining certain peer groups.

Remember, making friends takes time. If you are struggling to make acquaintances or friends, let your host family and LC know. While this may feel uncomfortable, your family and LC want you to succeed and can often provide great suggestions on how to meet more people.

Ten Pointers for Intercultural Success

1. Immerse yourself! Learn the language by using it as often as possible. Speak frequently, listen to American radio, and watch American movies. Try to avoid speaking your native language whenever possible.
2. Ask questions! Don't pretend to understand if you don't.
3. Be social and stay busy! This may be difficult for students who are naturally introverted, but now is the time to push yourself out of your comfort zone. Introduce yourself to as many people as possible; be the first one to say "Hi."
4. Have a good sense of humor! Learn to laugh at yourself. The ability to laugh at your mistakes is a positive way to approach the adjustment process.
5. Be patient with yourself and with others. You are learning a new culture and language. Feeling anxious is natural.
6. Communicate early and often! If you have a problem, discuss it with your host family or LC immediately. Letting tension build up will only create more problems. 99% of problems can be resolved through open and honest communication.
7. Remember, it's not good or bad— it's just different! Avoid quick judgments. Judging others quickly with a "good" or "bad" label without knowing the cultural reasons behind their behaviors only closes your mind to learning.
8. Be accountable! If you make a mistake or do something culturally inappropriate or that your host family would not approve of, take responsibility. This is a sign of maturity and will go a long way in building your relationships.
9. Pleasantries go a long way! Remember to say "please" and "thank you." And then say "thank you" again. You can't say "thank you" too often to your host family.
10. Be Flexible! Remember that unrealistic expectations are the cause of many disappointments and frustrations. The key to success is evaluating your expectations and readjusting them if necessary; understand that some of your expectations may not apply to your current situation and create new expectations or make the necessary adjustments to adapt to your surroundings.

Giving Back to Your Community

AYA's vision is to encourage students to become considerate and forward-thinking citizens of the world. With this pursuit in mind, AYA students are required to complete a minimum of 10 hours of local volunteer community service activities over the course of their homestay (FLEX and YES Students are required to complete 50 hours). Volunteering is an important aspect of American culture and is a special way to give back to your host community and say "thank you" for the support and encouragement you have received. Students who volunteer benefit from personal development, including a greater sense of cultural and social awareness, increased empathy, and personal growth. In addition to being personally rewarding, volunteering is also an excellent way to make friends and socialize!

There are many ways that students can volunteer in their communities. Your Local Coordinator can help you identify opportunities. Many students choose to volunteer through their school or a local church; popular activities include helping out at an animal shelter, food pantry or community fundraisers. Students may volunteer with any local charitable organization that they feel particularly connected to. AYA uses a great mobile app called MobileServe to log your community service hours.

Cultural Presentations

In addition to completing community service hours, AYA students are asked to participate in International Education Week (IEW), and complete at least one cultural presentation at their high school, or another school within their community (i.e. elementary or middle school). Sharing your culture with American students is an important part of citizen diplomacy and a great way to give back, while promoting exchange programs. Students who present benefit by building leadership and presentation skills as well as their overall confidence.

I'm scared of making presentations – help!

We understand that speaking in front of a group can be nerve-racking, but we also know that you are more than capable of doing it! As an exchange student you have already demonstrated great courage by coming to the U.S. and with the guidance from your Local Coordinator and the AYA Student Support team, you will be able to deliver a presentation that you can be proud of!

Presentation Tips:

It's okay to be nervous! Try to focus on what a great opportunity you have to tell people about your home country!

Speak about things you know and feel confident about. There's no need to be nervous if you're talking about your hometown, or a typical day of school in your home country.

Look up some simple, interesting facts about your country to grab the audience's attention. How big is your home country compared to the US geographically? Who are some famous actors/musicians/celebrities from your home country? What type of food is traditional in your country?

Have a visual display to go along with your presentation. A very simple PowerPoint presentation will help engage your audience and will help you keep your thoughts in order.

Have fun with it! Play music, show pictures of your family or hometown, or bring in food if you can.

Volunteering in the Community

Here are some groups and organizations that are always looking for volunteers:

- After school programs
- Church or youth group events
- Local animal shelters
- Bake sales to raise money for good causes
- Car wash to benefit a school team or club
- Local road races or community festivals
- Town library
- Food Pantry
- Local theatres or performance groups

International Education Week (IEW)

IEW is a wonderful opportunity for schools and organizations across America to celebrate international education. It is a joint initiative of the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Education to promote programs that prepare American citizens for a global environment and attract future leaders from abroad to study in the U.S. so that they can learn and exchange ideas and perspectives. IEW week is usually held for one week in November, before the Thanksgiving holiday.



Health and Safety

Illness and Medical Emergencies

If you become ill with more than a simple cold, your host family should advise your Local Coordinator and make sure you receive appropriate medical treatment. You are covered by insurance and will be able to receive urgent care at many health care facilities. Due to the AYA medical release form, your host family and/or Local Coordinator will be able to sign off on any urgent care that you may need.

You should carefully review your insurance plan and be familiar with co-pay and claims procedures to ensure you are making sound decisions about your medical care. AYA advises that you and your family work with your insurance provider to identify in-network physicians and urgent care centers whenever possible. If you go to a doctor or urgent care network that is not in your insurance network, you may have to pay additional charges. Emergency room visits should be reserved for true emergencies only.

In the event of a serious accident or illness, AYA will contact your natural parents immediately. In rare cases, students may need to return home to receive follow-up care or surgery in their home countries and be in the care of their natural parents.

Host parents are not financially responsible for medical treatment. Please give your natural family's contact information on all medical documents you complete.

Medical Disqualification

In the unfortunate situation that a student falls ill or requires medical treatment beyond the scope of what an AYA host family can provide, a student may be dismissed from the program. This decision is made with the long term health and well-being of the student in mind.

Reasons for medical disqualification may include, but are not limited to:

- Discovery of preexisting medical conditions not disclosed on a student's application, particularly nervous disorders or conditions that require close monitoring by a physician
- Injuries requiring surgery and/or ongoing physical therapy
- Serious medical conditions that require extensive medical care and follow-up care
- Eating disorders
- Emotional or psychological concerns that interfere with a student or host family's day-to-day activities and may require additional monitoring on the part of a student's natural parent(s) or legal guardian(s).

Your Health

Your health and wellbeing are paramount to AYA. We expect you to take good care of yourself and make responsible decisions about your health, including proper diet and nutrition, responsibly taking any medications that you are prescribed and promptly reporting any health concerns to your host family, Local Coordinator or AYA student support team member.

If you get sick

If you get sick and need to see a doctor, your host family or LC is responsible for making sure you are seen by a health care professional as soon as possible. You must report any unusual health symptoms as soon as you begin experiencing them so that you can be evaluated promptly and treated accordingly. All AYA students are required to carry insurance and will be able to see a wide range of doctors in their communities. In the rare case of an extreme emergency, AYA strongly suggests that students go straight to the nearest hospital emergency room.

If you are feeling down

Feeling sad or anxious is a normal part of adjusting to life in a new country with a new family (as well as a normal part of being a teenager!). While it is completely normal to experience feelings of sadness, loneliness or anxiety, it is important that you discuss your feelings with your host family, your Local Coordinator or an AYA student support team member. Your AYA support team has a lot of experience helping students through homesickness, culture shock and coping with challenges while on-program. We can help support you through these challenges so that you can have a positive and rewarding experience. Students will experience highs and lows throughout the program, and communication is the key to getting through them.

If you are experiencing more lows than highs, or persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety or depression that are not associated with your adjustment, please tell someone. These feelings can be overwhelming and difficult to talk about, but with support from AYA or a trusted professional, you can get through it. Talk to your host family, your Local Coordinator, an AYA team member, or anyone you trust about how you are feeling. Our goal is to support you and help you find healthy ways to cope with difficult feelings so that you can complete the program successfully. – we are here to listen!

Self-Harm

For some students, feelings of sadness may become so overwhelming that they consider harming themselves. Some students have heard that cutting themselves or self-inflicting injury may help reduce the pain or anxiety associated with these negative feelings. This is not a healthy or sustainable way to cope with these feelings.

If you or anyone you know has or is thinking about hurting themselves in anyway, it is imperative that you tell a trusted adult. As a program we are here to support you, guide you and help you navigate difficult feelings. We have experience in counseling students and will make sure that you get the support and help you need to feel better.

Insurance

All students have medical and accidental insurance. Insurance providers vary by country and overseas partner. Each student will receive an insurance card and policy information prior to departure and/or orientation. Student AYA ID cards will also have your insurance policy number and contact information printed on the back, along with AYA's emergency number in case of an emergency. For detailed information on coverage, please refer to your individual insurance plan.

Most insurance plans do not cover pre-existing conditions, routine care like physicals or eye exams, immunizations, or injuries sustained from participation in extreme sports or activities. Activities that are usually not covered by insurance include but are not limited to: boxing, combat sports, aerial sports, rock climbing, hang gliding, parachuting, bungee jumping, horseracing, scuba diving, white water rafting, jet skiing, water skiing, heli-skiing.

It is your responsibility to know what is covered and what is excluded under your insurance plan. If you or your host family are uncertain about whether an activity or sport is covered by insurance, please contact your provider or AYA for assistance or clarification prior to participation.

Submitting Claims

Students are instructed to refer to their individual policy for instructions on how to submit a claim. Depending on the provider, some students may need to make direct payments to the medical facilities and then submit their bills to the insurance provider for reimbursement. Students should keep copies of all bills they pay and forward them to their natural parents to ensure that expenses are reimbursed, and bills are paid in a timely manner. It is important that you and your host family understand the claims process and ask for assistance from your Local Coordinator or the AYA National Office if you need help. A basic summary of each policy will be sent to your host family before you arrive.

This joint initiative of the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Education is part of the efforts to promote programs that prepare Americans for a global environment and attract future leaders from abroad to study, learn, and exchange experiences. All claims must be settled and paid before you return home.

AYA recommends that students carry their insurance card with them at all times. If you lose your card, please contact your Local Coordinator or the AYA National Office to request a new one.

Student Safety

There will be times when you may be confused about behavior and what is and is not culturally acceptable. One of our main goals is to make sure that you are safe during your experience. This list will help you and your host family understand what types of actions and behaviors may be considered socially acceptable and what types may be not be acceptable regarding personal safety.

Positive/Appropriate Displays of Affection could include:

- Brief hugs
- Pats on the shoulder and back
- A handshake
- High-fives/slapping hands
- Verbal praise
- Brief touch on hands, face, shoulder, arms
- Arm around shoulder
- Holding hands during family prayer
- Brief kiss on the cheek

Negative/Inappropriate Displays of Affection could include:

- Inappropriate/uncomfortably long hugs and embraces
- Intentional brushing against a person's body, patting, or pinching
- Adult holding hands with student
- Kisses on the mouth
- Student sitting on adult's lap
- Touching bottoms, chest, or genital areas
- Showing affection in isolated areas like bathroom, bedroom
- Lying on same bed
- Placing hands/touching thighs, knees or legs
- Wrestling and tickling
- Any type of massage
- Written or spoken compliments referring to body parts or body development
- Excessive complimenting on physical appearance
- Giving a student excessive or expensive personal gifts or money
- Private meals in intimate places
- Any unwanted attention

Modesty Guidelines:

- No nudity by student or host family
- No contact between student and adult in underwear
- Wear robes over your pajamas
- No suggestive or revealing clothing
- Wearing only a towel is not acceptable

Behavior Guidelines:

- No requests for meeting with students privately
- No messages of a sexual or intimate nature
- No flirting
- No jokes or games with sexual connotation
- No lewd remarks, whistles or gestures
- No sharing, requesting or showing photos, videos or materials of a sexual nature

It is never appropriate, under any circumstances, for you to be approached or touched in a sexual or sexually suggestive manner by any member of your host family or any other adult. Such contact may constitute a criminal offense, and AYA will cooperate fully with the authorities in the investigation and prosecution of any such illegal activities. If anyone has attempted to inappropriately touch or speak with you, you must contact your Local Coordinator or the AYA office immediately.

Likewise, it is never appropriate for you to initiate any sexual contact with any member of your host family, including another exchange student.

Safety Precautions

AYA encourages you to be open-minded and meet new people while you are in the U.S. However, we also encourage you to exercise caution and be aware of interactions that could make you feel uncomfortable or lead to a potentially dangerous situation. Below, we have a few “red flags” to be aware of throughout the year. While they are not always indicators of a dangerous relationship or situation, they should serve as reminders to be aware of what is appropriate. We want to ensure that as you get to know new people, the relationships you are developing are healthy and positive.

- Be aware of any adult or individual who seeks to spend a lot of one-on-one “alone” time with you outside of an appropriate context. For example, a neighbor who wants to take you to the movies alone, a family friend who finds reasons to come and see you or invites you to one-on-one activities without your host family; or a coach who offers private lessons at their house. You should ask a trusted adult or AYA support staff member if you have questions about whether or not an invitation or interaction is appropriate.
- Texting and social media – be aware of who you are texting and interacting with on social media platforms. If you find that anyone is contacting you excessively or making comments to you that make you feel uncomfortable, contact AYA right away.
- Any adult who gives you lavish gifts, secret gifts, or gifts that are contingent upon an action from you (i.e., your neighbor tells you that if you get good grades, you’ll receive a special gift).
- Any adult who confides in you or asks you to keep a secret of any kind. It is not appropriate for adults to confide in teenagers as equals, nor is it appropriate for an adult to expect a teenager to keep a secret of any kind. If an adult in your life is confiding in you about their personal, marital or financial situation, contact your Local Coordinator or the AYA office for further discussion.

- Flirtations and sexually explicit jokes are never acceptable between an adult and a minor.
- Be aware of any adult who encourages you to break rules or engage in illegal or inappropriate behavior of any kind. For example, an adult who offers to purchase alcohol or drugs for you; an individual who offers to lie on your behalf or encourages you to break your host family rules.

It is never acceptable for anyone to touch you, harass you, or use their position of authority to coerce you into any type of relationship or inappropriate action. It is important that you understand your rights and speak up if something doesn't feel right. Your body belongs to you, and you have the right to control what happens to it, and to say NO to anyone at any time. If you are ever concerned or uncomfortable or simply have a question about an interaction or relationship are experiencing with an adult or peer, please contact the AYA student support team or emergency hotline immediately. We are here to help you and support you throughout your stay.

Safety Tips:

- Check with your host family or Local Coordinator before going anywhere new or unfamiliar to ensure that it is a safe place/area.
- Ask your host family and/or Local Coordinator if there are any parts of town to avoid when walking around during the day or night.
- When going out, try to always be with two or more people and avoid situations where you will be alone.
- Always carry a charged cell phone or ensure that the person you are with has a working cell phone.
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times. Be alert and avoid distractions when you are out in public or in an unfamiliar environment.
- Keep all of your host family's phone numbers, your Local Coordinators phone number, and AYA's office and emergency numbers with you at all times. Commit important phone numbers to memory in case you lose your phone and need to call someone.
- Ask your host family to write down emergency service numbers if you are going to be staying home alone for any length of time.
- If you are ever in a situation with friends or an adult that makes you feel uncomfortable for any reason, leave immediately and/or call your Local Coordinator, host family, or a trusted adult right away.
- **Always trust your instincts—if something doesn't feel right, let someone know!**



At School:

- American High Schools are required to conduct safety drills, including fire drills, school lockdowns, and active threat drills to ensure that students and faculty are familiar with emergency protocols. It is important to pay attention to your school's safety protocols and drills and ask questions if you don't understand the instructions given to you.
- If you feel unsafe at school for any reason, it is important that you inform a responsible adult. Reach out to a guidance counselor or teacher for support and immediate assistance, especially if you are concerned about your own wellbeing or the safety or welfare of another student.
- Let your host family and Local Coordinator know if you are feeling unsafe at school; you may also call the AYA office for assistance. It is important that you share any concerns with your support network so that they can help you feel more comfortable and address any safety issues if necessary.

Emergency

If you have a non-life-threatening emergency of any kind outside of business hours (9 a.m. – 5 p.m. EST), AYA has a 24-hour toll free emergency answering service available to assist you 7 days a week, year-round. Our toll-free phone number is 800.322.4678. Follow the prompts from the operator or stay on the line to be connected with the answering service.

If for any reason you are not able to reach your Local Coordinator or AYA through our emergency support outlets, you may also contact the Department of State Emergency Hotline at 866.283.9090.

Our goal is to ensure that you are safe, and we encourage you to reach out if you have any concerns. We are here to help you!

While AYA is your first line of support, if you are ever in a situation where you have sustained a serious injury, feel unsafe or you have been or feel you may soon become the victim of sexual or physical abuse or violence, we encourage you to seek immediate assistance by contacting a trusted adult and/or emergency 911 services as soon as possible.

Firearms and Weapons

Students are not permitted to purchase, carry, or use firearms or any items classified as a weapon (i.e. knives, air/pellet guns, cross bows) under any circumstances, including under the supervision of an instructor or host parent. Students should report any instance of firearms or weapons being stored improperly in the host home immediately. Likewise, if a student is offered the opportunity to handle or use any firearms or classified weapons in or out of the host home, they should report that to their Local Coordinator and/or the AYA National Office.

If you become aware that any of your peers, friends or acquaintances have unlawful access to a firearm or weapon, it is important that you report this to the proper authorities and your AYA support team. If you find yourself in a situation where firearms or weapons are being accessed for any reason, please remove yourself immediately and inform your host family, Local Coordinator and/or the AYA support team as soon as possible.

Important Documents and Money Matters

Lost Passport

Carefully guard your passport, visa, and DS-2019 form while you are in the U.S. Keep a copy of your passport separate from the original. You won't be allowed to return home without your passport and replacing it could take weeks and will be at your own expense. If you do lose your passport, you will need to get copies of your passport details, such as the passport number, date, and place of issue, and visa details from your natural family in your home country. Once you have your passport details, contact your country's nearest Embassy, Consulate, or High Commission. They should then be able to issue you a new passport. If you cannot obtain your passport details, your embassy will have to establish your identity, which could take several weeks. **It is your responsibility to safeguard your passport. Do not turn it over to anyone, including your host family or Local Coordinator for safe keeping.**

Money and Banking

You may arrive with spending money for the year or receive monthly or periodic allowances from your natural parents. Most students spend about \$300 per month on personal expenses; however, this may vary depending on your personal budget. Keep in mind that in addition to personal expenses such as entertainment, school supplies, toiletries, clothing and cell phone bills, you may also need additional funds for specific dietary requests or preferences.

When you arrive, check with your host family to determine which local banks can receive international cable transfers of money from overseas banks, and the standard procedure for clearing international checks or money orders. Not all banks are equipped to provide these services, and procedures vary from bank to bank. Also confirm bank regulations for minors opening a checking account. Your money should never be placed in the host family's account. Soon after you arrive, ask your host family or Local Coordinator to help you open an account in your name if possible. As a safety precaution, you should never carry large sums of cash around, and keep all cash locked up in a safe or bank account. You should not give your P.I.N. number for any credit cards or money cards to anyone. You are not allowed to give or lend your host family money for any reason; likewise, you should not borrow or ask for money from your host family.

You should create a financial plan for the year and a monthly budget. Clearly discuss with your host family what you will be responsible for paying regarding trips and weekly entertainment. If your funds seem to be running low, please inform your natural parents that you need additional funds.

If you bring over a credit card, you should keep the account number and expiration date of your credit card in a secure place. In the event that your card is lost or stolen, this will help you cancel your old card and receive a new one.



Travel (Inbound, On-Program and Outbound)

Traveling During the Program

The primary purpose of the AYA program is to learn about American culture through a home stay and high school experience while sharing your own culture with others. Host families are not expected to take you to America's big cities and national parks. Some families travel a lot and others do not. Your host family may take you to local tourist spots, but that may only happen a few times during the year. Further travel can always be done after the program ends when you return to visit your host family and the friends you made while on the program. **Recreational travel while school is in session is discouraged;** one of your first priorities on the AYA program is to attend school daily. There are a few school breaks throughout the academic year; these are ideal times to book travel (if your host family wishes to do so). When the opportunity to travel does arise, AYA allows you to travel with your host family or Local Coordinator without any special restrictions (except for international travel) other than informing the AYA office of your whereabouts.

If you would like to travel without your HF, LC, or on a school-sponsored overnight trip, you must request permission from the AYA National Office, at least 4 weeks in advance, by submitting a proposal to travel. The following criteria applies to all travel requests:

- All travel plans must first be approved by your current host family, your Local Coordinator and the AYA office **prior to booking or finalizing travel arrangements.**
- All trips without your host family must be appropriately supervised by an adult who is 25 years or over and has been approved by the AYA National Office.
- You must be in good academic and behavioral standing with the AYA program at the time of the request.
- Travel requests must be signed by all of the necessary approvers, including your natural parents or legal guardian.
- If approved, you must leave a complete itinerary and phone numbers where you can be reached with your host family and your Local Coordinator.

Approval from the AYA office is based on satisfaction of the above criteria. Students who do not follow the above protocol or travel without AYA's permission may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including program disqualification. Students who confirm travel arrangements/reservations prior to receiving approval from AYA may be required to cancel reservations and will incur the cost of cancellation fees or loss of non-refundable fares, reservations or tours.

Traveling Abroad

If you plan to travel outside the U.S. with your host family while on the exchange program, you will need to submit a travel request form signed by your parents at least six weeks prior to your trip. It is your responsibility to obtain the necessary information and documents before traveling. You should allow a minimum of six weeks to complete these requirements. If you do not obtain the appropriate paperwork, there is a possibility that you will not be allowed to leave the U.S. or re-enter the U.S. Here are the initial steps to complete:

- You should check your J-1 Visa inside your passport for an "M" stamped in the "Entries" block. If an "M" is stamped there, this indicates that it is a multiple entry visa and will allow you to successfully re-enter the United States.
- You or your host family should contact the nearest consulate of the country to which you are traveling to find out if additional documents (i.e. visa) are required for travel.
- Your DS-2019 form must be signed by a responsible/alternate responsible program officer from the AYA national office before you can travel. You will not be permitted to leave and return to the U.S. during your program year without an authorized signature. Luckily this process can be completed digitally, so as long as you and your host family reach out to the AYA office 6 weeks in advance of travel, we can easily guide you through the process.
- You should never relinquish your DS-2019 form and should always bring it with you along with all necessary paperwork when traveling outside the U.S. You will not be permitted to travel outside the U.S. without your endorsed DS-2019 form.
- You should make copies of all documents before turning them over to a consulate or mailing them.
- Some countries require special documentation for minors traveling without their natural parents or legal guardians. For example, Mexico requires minors who are not traveling with their parents/guardians to provide a specific letter of consent that must be notarized and signed by a student's natural parents/guardians. It is your responsibility to ensure that you and/or your natural parents can comply with the required paperwork prior to travel.

Please be aware that these steps are only the basic requirements for traveling abroad. You are responsible for determining all requirements and cost for your travel. There may be times when you are denied access to another country. This decision is solely at the discretion of each country's consulate. **It should be noted that some cruise line itineraries will take you into other countries; in these cases, all the above applies, just as with any other form of travel.**

Please note the process for traveling aboard differs for FLEX and YES students, please contact your Student Support Specialist at least 2 months prior to your trip to begin the approval process.

Visits from Family/Friends

It is important to start the bonding process with your host family early so that you can better acclimate to your new surroundings. One way to accomplish this is by limiting communication with your natural family and friends back in your home country. The most important thing is to be intentional with your communication, instead of being attached to your phone all day everyday.

Your natural parents and/or friends may want to visit you during your stay in the U.S. It is very important to understand that AYA and our overseas partner do not allow visits from family and friends back home during most of the program. The reason is simple: Our experience has shown us that visits from home can be very disruptive to your year in America, can lead to difficulties with adjusting, and may result in extreme homesickness and possibly an early return home. Even students who have adapted well to their homestay are at increased risk of experiencing homesickness or adjustment issues after a visit from family. If your natural family intend to visit you while you are in the U.S., please arrange for this to occur at the end of the school semester, **December 15th for August semester students and April 15th for full year or January Semester students.**

We understand that parents or relatives may wish to visit with you before the end of the year for special occasions like birthdays, anniversaries or even family milestones, but this is not permitted. We encourage you to celebrate milestones with your host family and are confident that your friends and family back home will be able to support your success by refraining from requesting any exceptions to this policy. Additionally, you must seek permission from your host family well in advance of an end of year visit (and before any tickets or arrangements are booked) to make sure they are comfortable with the visit.

Return Flight Plans

You are required to hold valid return airline tickets. Some students have an open-ended return flight that allows for a free or low-cost date change. These tickets are purchased by either you or through AYA's overseas partner organization. Your natural family or home country agency will help you arrange travel after you have selected an appropriate departure date, which should be based on your last day of school.

Your last day of school may vary from the original date listed in your placement notification. Schools that close due to inclement weather often extend the last day of school by a certain number of days. Once you have confirmed your last day of school, you should speak to your host family about their end-of-year plans and choose a date within one week after school ends to return home. It is important that you confirm this date with your host family and Local Coordinator so that they can plan for it in advance. Once your date is confirmed, you will need to work with your parents and/or your overseas agency to book your confirmed trip. If you need to change your departure airport for any reason, you may be required to pay change fees. Any flight change fees associated with your return flight are your responsibility. In order to minimize unnecessary fees, when possible, you should confirm the exact rebooking process with your parents and partners prior to finalizing your return. Don't worry, you will receive reminders from AYA along the way!

End-of-Year Travel

If your natural parents are planning on meeting you in the U.S., you will need to sign off the program once you are in their care. Please be aware that if you and your parents choose to travel prior to returning home, you do so at your own risk, and it will be your responsibility to know and abide by all visa regulations related to departing the U.S.





AYA Student Code of Conduct

AYA's goal is to ensure that all of our participants have a safe and rewarding experience while maintaining a community where the rights and dignity of all individuals are valued and respected. The student code of conduct is the foundation of the AYA disciplinary process and serves to support the program rules.

As hosts, it is important that you understand, that while we expect our students to adhere to the code of conduct and the principles and rules set forth in their handbook, there will be times, when like any other teenager, your student will push boundaries and make mistakes. This is normal, and your LC and AYA support team will work with your student to correct minor behavioral issues and reach a positive outcome. Above all, we expect that students will, at all times, conduct themselves in a manner that positively reflects the goals and values of the AYA program, their home country and themselves.

Objective of Student Code of Conduct

The purpose of the Student Code of Conduct is to establish a consistent set of expectations for student behavior on the AYA program. AYA's primary objective is to ensure that each of our participants has a safe and rewarding experience wherein the rights and dignity of all individuals are valued and respected. The standards and values set forth in the Student Code of Conduct are the foundation of AYA's disciplinary process and program rules. As a participant on the AYA program you are a reflection of our goals and values, and AYA expects you to represent the program well and behave in a way that honors the integrity of the program as well as our mission to bring the world together. If your behavior or attitude is determined to undermine the AYA mission or the Code of Conduct and Rules, your participation on the AYA program could be terminated prematurely.

AYA is dedicated to helping you succeed and enjoy a safe and rewarding experience. As such, we have outlined the standards of conduct that we expect all of our participants to uphold, and included examples of behaviors that are not acceptable. Please review this information carefully so that you are aware of AYA's expectations and prepared for an exciting and successful year ahead!

Standards of Personal Integrity and Honesty

The following behaviors violate AYA's standards of personal integrity and honesty:

1. **Misrepresenting personal circumstances or deliberately issuing false statements**, in order to change host families or obtain any outcome that is favorable to the student is considered a serious infraction of the student code of conduct. Student safety is paramount to AYA and the program encourages students to report any and all circumstances that have the potential to compromise a student's health, safety or overall well-being. AYA takes any allegations of impropriety, misconduct or unsuitable housing arrangements seriously and will take swift and appropriate action to ensure that the student is safe and investigate the claims accordingly. AYA values the safety, health and dignity of all of our participants, representatives and volunteers and students must be aware that issuing false claims or statements about any person or circumstance associated with the placement has the potential to permanently damage the reputation of an individual, family or community and is considered a serious breach of ethics. If a student is found to have deliberately issued any false statements or deliberately misrepresented their circumstances for any reason, they will be subject to immediate disciplinary action, up to and including disqualification.
2. **Intentionally furnishing, misrepresenting or omitting information on the student application**. AYA student applications must be completed accurately and honestly in order for AYA program staff to make an informed decision about a student's eligibility to participate on the program.
3. **Academic Dishonesty**. Any academic act of deception that is intentionally done to gain an unfair advantage for the student or another individual. This includes but is not limited to giving or receiving assistance in an academic assignment/exam; plagiarizing or paraphrasing without appropriate citation and intentionally taking credit for the work of others.

Standards of Respect and Kindness

All students are expected to show respect and kindness to others, particularly their host family members, AYA Representatives, teachers and figures of authority. Students should always use polite language, speak calmly, address individuals kindly and with consideration to their feelings. Students are entitled to the same respect and kindness from others. Except in cases where safety is an imminent risk, students are also expected to follow AYA's communication chain when reporting a concern. The following are examples of behaviors that undermine standards of respect and kindness:

Shouting, screaming, using a hostile tone or expletives towards any member of your host family, Local Coordinator or individual in a position of authority. Students must resolve conflict in a manner that is culturally appropriate and respectful. AYA has a comprehensive process in place to resolve any issues and will help students address and resolve issues in a constructive manner.

Speaking negatively or sharing personal and potentially damaging information about your host family or Local Coordinator. Barring situations of imminent danger, students should be respectful and discreet regarding their host family's personal affairs. This includes conversations, texts, messages or social media posts or exchanges that could be potentially hurtful or damaging. Host families open their hearts and homes to students with the understanding that students will respect their privacy and be considerate of their reputation within their community and/or school, even when conflicts arise. Any issues should be discussed with your LC or the AYA support team only.

Bullying: Bullying is defined as unwanted, hostile, or aggressive behavior among children and teenagers that involves a real or perceived imbalance of power. Bullying actions can occur on or off school grounds, in person, or digitally via text, internet or social media. AYA will not tolerate bullying of any kind, and any indication that a student is involved with bullying another individual will result in immediate disciplinary action up to and including disqualification. AYA students should also let their host family, Local Coordinator or AYA know if they have been or are currently being bullied on program. Bullying actions include but are not limited to:

- a) Making threats or disparaging comments
- b) Spreading rumors
- c) Assaulting someone physically or verbally
- d) Intentionally excluding an individual from a group

Standards of Safety and Dignity

The following behaviors undermine AYA's objective to respect and protect the safety, health and dignity of all individuals:

1. **Intentionally or recklessly endangering the student's own health, safety or welfare or that of any individual.** This includes but is not limited to the following:
 - a) Possession of any object classified as a weapon (i.e. knives, firearms, bludgeon weapons, brass knuckles, explosives, etc.).
 - b) Operating a motor vehicle without a license or outside of AYA program rules.

- c) Driving with a person who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
 - d) Driving with a person who is showing irresponsible behavior (i.e. cell phone use, texting, speeding, racing, etc.).
 - e) Consuming and/or sharing drugs, alcohol, tobacco, e-cigarettes, including abuse of over the counter drugs, supplements and prescription drugs being used for recreational purposes.
 - f) Possession of drugs or alcohol, tobacco or e-cigarettes, and/or related paraphernalia (any equipment, product or item intended or designed for the use, including growing, harvesting, packaging, testing, storing, concealing or ingesting drugs alcohol or tobacco).
2. **Disorderly Conduct:** Any behavior that is intended to be disruptive, threatening, lewd or indecent. This includes the intentional or reckless destruction or damage of personal property (i.e. vandalism, tire slashing, damaging pranks).
 3. **Demonstrating a lack of sound judgment and maturity by engaging in behavior that could compromise the student's own safety and wellbeing. For example:**
 - a) Getting into a car with a stranger;
 - b) Leaving the home or school without permission and/or knowledge of your surroundings
 - c) Knowingly going to places where illegal activity could be present (i.e., parties or a friend's house; concerts, after-prom parties, etc.)
 4. **Irresponsible use of social media/communication outlets:**
 - a) Engaging in sexually explicit conversations via social media, text messages or other digital communications
 - b) Sharing sexually explicit or violent images or videos.
 - c) Posting or sharing photos that may be sexually suggestive
 - d) Posting or sharing content that disparages or demeans any individual, race, religion or sexual orientation
 - e) Posting, sharing or commenting on content that could compromise the trust, privacy or character of the student, his or her host family or any other peer or member of the community
 5. **Harassment:** AYA defines harassment as any instance or repeated instances of conduct which annoys, threatens or causes an individual to fear for his or her safety. AYA will not tolerate any behavior that is intended to threaten, disparage or offend an individual. Examples of harassing behavior include but are not limited to:
 - a) Uninvited comments about any individual's appearance.
 - b) Unwanted touching, gestures or comments of a sexual nature including, verbal, non-verbal and written communication.
 - c) Derogatory comments intended to disparage or demean an individual based on sex, religion, race, ethnicity, physical or mental challenges, or sexual orientation.
 - d) Physical assault of any kind.

AYA Program Rules

Program Rules

The program 'rules' are part of the AYA Student Code of Conduct that highlight and reinforce specific provisions that students need to be aware of and follow at all times in order to remain in good standing with the program. Failure to abide by the Code of Conduct which includes all the AYA Program Rules will result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from the program. It is important to note that AYA has several **Zero Tolerance** rules that will result in immediate disqualification from the program. Other serious infractions that could result in immediate termination will be reviewed by the disciplinary committee in a disqualification hearing. Zero Tolerance rules and behavior that could result in immediate dismissal from the program are noted below.

1. Students must abide by all U.S federal and state laws (**Zero Tolerance**). This includes laws related to drugs, alcohol, theft, assault, and other criminal behavior. Students who violate U.S. law may be subject to prosecution within the American justice system. Students who are 18 years old should be especially mindful that if they break the law, they will be charged and prosecuted as an adult, which could have serious and longstanding effects on their criminal record. **Breaking the law may be grounds for immediate program termination.**
2. It is against the law in the United States for high school students to buy or drink alcohol (**Zero Tolerance**). AYA program rules strictly prohibits the purchase, possession or consumption of alcohol while on-program. The legal age for buying and consuming alcohol in the United States is 21.
3. The use and/or possession of drugs or drug paraphernalia under any circumstances is strictly prohibited (Zero Tolerance). Sharing, selling, and using prescription drugs for recreational reasons is forbidden. Examples of illicit drugs include, cocaine, marijuana, LSD, methamphetamines, etc. Breach of this rule will result in immediate termination. It is important to note than even if you are 18 years old or live in a state where marijuana is legal, use and possession of marijuana is strictly prohibited while on the AYA Program and will result in immediate disqualification.
4. Expulsion from school (**Zero Tolerance**). If a student is expelled or a high school rescinds a student's enrollment for behavioral or academic reasons, the student will be disqualified immediately. School suspension will result in immediate probation and is grounds for a disqualification hearing.
5. The possession or use of vaping devices, e-cigarettes, tobacco, or nicotine products is strictly prohibited under AYA policy and U.S. law for individuals under 21. While not classified as a zero-tolerance offense, this is a serious violation of program rules which will result in immediate probation and is grounds for a disqualification hearing.
6. Harassment/bullying of any kind is strictly prohibited. This includes but is not limited to physical assault, verbal harassment or sexual harassment. **Students who engage or are complicit in the harassment of another individual will be subject to a disciplinary hearing that may result in immediate disqualification.**
7. AYA students are not permitted to purchase, carry, or use firearms or any items classified as a weapon (i.e. knives, air/pellet guns, cross bows) under any circumstances including under the supervision of an instructor or host parent. Students should report any instance of firearms being stored improperly or being offered to a student to handle to their LC or the AYA national office. Possession or use of weapons is grounds for a disqualification hearing.
8. Students are not permitted to drive any motor vehicle (including motorcycles, mopeds, and cars). Driving outside of program guidelines is grounds for a disqualification hearing.
9. Sexual intercourse while on program is strictly prohibited and grounds for program termination. Students must be cognizant of inappropriate relationships, including (but not limited to) contact with minors, persons over the age of 18, or any members of the Host Family. **Sexual intercourse is grounds for a disqualification hearing.**
10. Along with maintaining a minimum grade point average of C+, students must be in good behavioral standing with their high school at all times. This includes attending classes daily and on time, and turning in all required assignments. All students must enroll in a full course of academic classes, which must include math, science, English and U.S history or social studies. **Failure to maintain or demonstrate a concerted effort to maintain grade requirements is grounds for serious disciplinary action including disqualification.**
11. Daily attendance at school is mandatory. Students who are home sick for more than a few days must provide a doctor's note for their absences. Repeated tardies (lateness) or unexcused absences from classes are grounds for a disciplinary committee hearing. **Failure to maintain proper attendance and participation in school is grounds for serious disciplinary action including disqualification.**
12. Grade placement, graduation eligibility, and athletic participation are determined by the high school. AYA students are required to comply with the policies of the high school in which they are enrolled. Students will not be permitted to change schools or host families in order to obtain a diploma, change grades, take a specific course, or participate in sports or extracurricular clubs.
13. AYA is an academic cultural exchange program for high school students. Students should expect to complete one semester or year in the U.S. and return home to pursue future educational endeavors. Students should not expect to take college examinations, apply to college/university or initiate a change in visa status while on the AYA program. Students may be subject to disciplinary action if their actions while on program are not aligned with the AYA's academic and cultural objectives.
14. Students must abide by AYA's social media policy and remain aware that while they are a participant on the AYA program, they are a reflection of AYA and its values. Any social media activity that may bring the student, host family or program negative attention is considered grounds for disciplinary action. Students must act responsibly when using social media and the internet and be mindful of the websites and platforms

they are using. Students are not permitted to visit adult websites, or websites that promote illegal or violent activity. **Using social media or digital communication to exploit yourself or another individual intentionally or otherwise is grounds for a disqualification hearing.**

15. Students are expected to be honest and ethical at all times. Misrepresenting personal circumstances To change host families or obtain any advantage or desired result is considered very serious. If a student is found to have intentionally falsified or misrepresented his or her circumstances within the host family or the community, they will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including disqualification from the program.
16. With the exception of emergencies, students may not change host families or schools within the first 30 days of their program or without due process, which in most cases includes Face-to-Face meetings and corrective action. Students may not move from the host family home without permission from their Local Coordinator and approval from the AYA national office.
17. Students must respect and abide by all host family rules, act as a member of the family, and voluntarily help with household chores. Students must show respect for their host family and Local Coordinators and follow all program guidelines. Students are expected spend holidays, birthdays and special occasions with their host family.
18. Except in cases where a student's safety is in question, students must follow the appropriate chain of communication and contact their Local Coordinator or an AYA support staff member if there is an issue or concern with their host family. Students may not discuss their host family's private affairs or family life with people outside of the home or the AYA program.
19. Students may not make any major life decisions while on program. AYA expects you to return to your home country in the same physical condition that you arrived; this means students may not get pierced, tattooed, or drastically alter their appearance in any way. No student, regardless of age, may enter into any contractual agreement, be it business, marital, or religious, while on the program.
20. AYA students are prohibited from using ride-sharing services such as Uber or Lyft without being accompanied by a host parent.
21. Students are strictly prohibited from operating or being a passenger on All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) of any kind. Students are also not permitted to operate or be a passenger on small, private, or non-commercial aircrafts, even with a licensed pilot.
22. AYA students are not permitted to hold part time jobs; the J-1 visa does not allow it. A non-immigrant alien who accepts paid employment is subject to deportation. If students would like to earn spending money during their stay, they are permitted to hold small jobs (no more than 10 hours per week) such as baby-sitting or grass-cutting.
23. Students must abide by the AYA travel and visitation policies noted in the student handbook. Students may not return to their home country for holidays or for any reason other than

an extreme emergency. Travelling or arranging visits with **family or friends without permission or outside of program guidelines will result in immediate probation and may be grounds for a disqualification hearing.**

24. The AYA program concludes on the last day of school; students must return home within a few days of that date. If absolutely necessary, students may stay up to one week after the end of school, and only with the explicit approval of their host family and AYA. When the program ends, students may only sign off the program to be placed in the care of their immediate natural family

Additional AYA Program Guidelines:

In addition to following the above-listed program rules, AYA students will be reminded and expected to abide by the following guidelines:

Students must always be aware of their responsibilities as an exchange student and make a determined effort to be successful in their school, host family, and host community.

Students should do their best to practice and speak English all the time, especially if there are other exchange students in the community who share the same native language. Being mindful of always speaking English, will help students improve their language skills and help them adjust to and integrate with American life more easily.

On special occasions (holidays, birthdays, etc.), the student's priority must be to spend this time with the host family. Host families should be mindful that these types of occasions may trigger feelings of homesickness and do their best to be curious about the student's traditions and customs and incorporate them into celebrations if possible.

Students should try to limit phone calls, emails, and digital communication to parents or friends from their home country and respect Host Family rules regarding internet and phone usage. All students should be aware that if it is determined that excessive communication with friends back home is contributing to adjustment issues, a counseling plan may be implemented to temporarily adjust or limit communication with friends and family so that the student can focus on cultural immersion in the U.S.



Disciplinary Policies and Procedures:

AYA students are expected to conduct themselves at all times in a manner that positively reflects themselves, their home country, and the goals of the AYA program. Students must follow all U.S. laws and AYA, host family, and high school rules and guidelines. Students are required to sign a copy of the AYA rules prior to their arrival in the U.S. Disciplinary decisions are made at the discretion of the AYA Disciplinary Committee based on information provided by the LC, the host family, the student, and the high school (when applicable). It is strongly recommended that students carefully review the program rules with their natural parents prior to departing from their home country.

Documenting and addressing academic or behavioral concerns is an important part of the disciplinary process. It is very important for host families to inform their Local Coordinator or the AYA student support team when there are problems, no matter how small they are. AYA cannot effectively administer the disciplinary process in a timely manner without the appropriate documentation about the issues that are being reported.

Face-to-Face Meetings Sessions

A Face-to-Face family meeting is generally the first step in resolving most issues. This can be an informal conversation or a more formal family meeting where you and your student have the opportunity to candidly discuss any issues that may arise within the placement. This meeting might be the result of an issue that you report or it may come from the student. In some cases, your Local Coordinator may become aware through the monthly check in process that there is a communication gap and may recommend that everyone come together for a family discussion. Your Local Coordinator will conduct the meeting and act as a neutral party who will help you and your student work through any issues big or small.

- Face-to-Face Meetings have proven to be very successful in opening a dialogue between host families and students as well as clarifying cultural and/or language miscommunications.
- A Face-to-Face Meeting is a critical step in the disciplinary process and will be done prior to any disciplinary action or host family change request.
- Students and host families are encouraged to attend Face-to-Face sessions with an open mind and positive attitude.

Guidance Directive

Over the course of the year, students may receive a guidance directive that may serve to:

- Document a particular concern or behavior.
- Implement guidelines on how to make the necessary adjustments to be successful on the program.

A guidance directive may be issued with or in lieu of an Advisory Letter. Guidance directives may not lead to further disciplinary action.

Advisory

An advisory letter is issued by the AYA Student Support Specialist after a breach of conduct or program guidelines has been reported and reviewed. Advisory letters are usually issued after a Face-to-Face Meeting has occurred, and the student has been formally advised of the program or host family guidelines that have been compromised or need improvement. In cases where the breach of guidelines is indisputable, for example, if a student is not meeting minimum grade requirements, an academic advisory letter may be issued without a formal Face-to-Face Meeting. In such cases, the Local Coordinator will notify the student of the advisory prior to issuance and will review the letter and requirements for improvement with the student after it is received. A copy of the advisory is sent to the student. The intent of the advisory letter may be as follows:

- To advise the student that certain academic or behavioral conduct or attitudes need improvement and provide feedback on how to improve going forward.
- To formally inform the student, the natural family, and the overseas partners of unacceptable behavior or program violation.
- To advise the student that the National Office is aware of this behavior.
- To advise what specific steps must be taken by the student to avoid further disciplinary action.
- To formally define a time frame for reviewing the terms and recommendations of the advisory letter.

Probationary Status

Being placed on probation is considered very serious. Students will be subject to probation for the following reasons:

- A major breach of program rules or host family guidelines.
- Not abiding by the terms of a previously issued advisory letter or guidance directive
- Conduct unbecoming of an exchange student that may jeopardize the reputation of the student, host family, or the AYA program.

Prior to being placed on probation, the student will be contacted by their Student Support Specialist to discuss the disciplinary concerns. Students are expected to be honest and forthcoming when speaking to a Student Support Specialist; and to share their perspective on any matter related to the events or behavior that have prompted the probation meeting. Your Local Coordinator will also present your input and feedback based on the current situation to our Student Support Team.

Disqualification

Disqualification is not a decision that is taken lightly; whenever possible we will seek to provide counseling and appropriate corrective measures so that students have the opportunity to reflect and grow from their mistakes while on-program.

If a student's conduct is deemed serious enough to merit termination, AYA's student support team will review the case to determine whether program disqualification is warranted. Any student who fails to comply with the AYA rules, the host family rules, or local and federal laws may be terminated from the AYA program at any point in the year. Sending a student home is usually considered a last resort, and this decision is made at the sole discretion of the AYA Disciplinary Committee. This step is usually taken after other corrective measures have failed or if the infraction has violated a major program rule or a federal or state law.

In some cases, a student's actions may result in disqualification from the program without prior disciplinary action. Students who breach a zero-tolerance rule, under any circumstances, will be dismissed from the program immediately. In addition to zero-tolerance rules, there are other serious infractions that may result in immediate termination, including use/possession of weapons, school suspension and sexual activity. While AYA understands that good students sometimes experience lapses in judgement, our zero-tolerance policies have been carefully considered, and are in place so that AYA can safely administer the program, and in doing so, equalize the consequences for all students who break rules that could compromise their safety or wellbeing, or the safety and wellbeing of others. **Students are notified of zero-tolerance policies and the consequences of breaking them, both prior to applying to the program and after being accepted. No exceptions will be made for zero-tolerance rules.** Despite the early departure from program, we encourage students to maintain the connections they have created with their host family members and friends.

Although unlikely, if your student is disqualified from the program due to a serious breach of program rules, your family may feel frustrated and disappointed with this consequence. This is a normal response, which AYA fully understands and empathizes with, however, no exceptions will be made for zero-tolerance rules. Despite the early departure from program, we encourage students to reflect positively on their time in the U.S. and maintain the connections they have created with their host family members and friends.

Once the AYA Disciplinary Committee has made their final decision, written notice will be issued to all parties concerned, and arrangements for the student's return flight home are then made. Depending on the situation, the time of year, and the country the student is returning to, it can take anywhere from a few days to a week or so to finalize the student's departure date. Students are expected to be on their best behavior as they prepare to return home. Once the student's departure date has been confirmed, their visa will be cancelled.

The decision to disqualify a FLEX or YES student differs slightly and is made in conjunction with the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). AYA will submit a formal request for early repatriation of a student whose behavior or incident warrants disqualification to the ECA who makes the final decision.

Medical Disqualification

In the unfortunate situation that a student falls ill or requires medical treatment beyond the scope of what an AYA host family can provide, a student may be terminated from the program for health reasons. This decision is made with the interest and wellbeing of the student in mind, and in the context of what the AYA program can safely offer a student.

Reasons for medical disqualification include, but are not limited to:

- Discovery of preexisting medical conditions not disclosed on a student's application, particularly complex or nervous that may require close or ongoing monitoring by a physician or guardian. Disorders or conditions that require close monitoring by a physician
- Injuries requiring surgery and/or ongoing physical therapy
- Serious medical conditions that require extensive medical care and follow-up care
- Eating disorders or any disordered eating that may be negatively impacting the students physical and/or mental health and/or caused a noticeable change in their appearance, physical health and/or overall demeanor.
- Emotional or psychological concerns that may require ongoing counseling and close monitoring.

When determining eligibility for a medical situation, AYA must carefully consider current and future risk to the student, the ability of a host family and Local Coordinator to reasonably care for that student for the remainder of the year, as well as insurance coverage and limitations. Most importantly, AYA considers the best interest of the student which (the disappointment of leaving the program early notwithstanding), is usually to return to their home country where they can receive medical treatment and follow up care with the support and supervision of their natural parents.

A medical disqualification is difficult for all parties concerned. Host families never cease to amaze us with their compassion and generosity, and in some cases, may wish to continue hosting a student who has been deemed ineligible to remain on-program. AYA recognizes that host families are deeply committed to their students and we sincerely appreciate the goodwill that caring host families extend in these situations. Ultimately, however, a student's long-term medical care and needs are best determined by their natural parents. Once the decision has been made, we ask that host families support their student by supporting our decision.

End-of-Year Preparations

The official end of the AYA program is the last day of school attended. You should return home within a few days of this date.

Extensions

If you are an August semester student and would like to extend for another semester, please contact your Local Coordinator to request an application to extend your program. Only August semester students are eligible to extend. Your Local Coordinator will provide you with the appropriate forms for signatures. Your host family, Local Coordinator, school and natural parents must all agree to the extension. Students who extend may not change host families in the second semester unless there are extenuating circumstances.

To be eligible to extend, students must be invited to stay with their original host family and continue studying in their original high school for the spring semester. Students on probation or with a disciplinary history including behavioral or academic concerns are not allowed to extend. If you have received a Guidance Directive or Advisory Letter, your request to extend will be reviewed on an individual basis.

December 1st is the deadline for extension paperwork to be submitted to the AYA office. AYA has final approval over extension requests and reserves the right to accept or deny any extensions.

Students on extension cannot travel outside of the U.S. due to visa restrictions. Additional fees and insurance will be required.

End-of-Program Visa Regulations

In compliance with federal regulations, AYA is required to maintain accurate records for all exchange visitors for whom we sponsor a visa. When a student leaves the program for any reason (voluntary, involuntary, school ends), AYA will update our SEVIS records to ensure that the student's end-date is properly recorded, at which time the technical grace period will begin. Students are responsible for reporting accurate departure dates and complying with all end-of-year program guidelines. Students who do not comply with end-of-year departure procedures are at risk for encountering travel complications when they depart and/or attempt to re-enter the U.S. in the future.

Final Reminders

You and your host family will find it hard to believe that the semester or year has come to an end. Here is a reminder checklist to go over at least two weeks prior to departure:

- Confirm return flight date and time
- Gather all necessary travel documents
- Pay any outstanding bills (insurance claims, cell phone bills, school fees, etc.)
- Finalize convalidation and make appropriate arrangements with your Local Coordinator or Host family if further assistance is required
- Pack and weigh luggage to ensure it is within airline weight limits (contact airlines for more details). If luggage is over airline weight limits, you should plan to incur the extra cost or make prior plans for shipping
- Say thank you! Expressing appreciation is an easy and effective way to show your host family, local coordinator, teachers and friends that you care. AYA encourages all students to write sincere thank you notes to their American friend(s) and family - they will be very happy to know how they have positively contributed to your growth and experience as an exchange student.





Returning Home

A great amount of information has been written on culture shock, homesickness, and creating a bond with the host family. The adjustment that you will need to make after you return to your home country is just as crucial to prepare for. Also known as re-entry shock, Reverse Culture Shock (RCS) is the disorientation and adaptation that occurs when one is trying to readjust to their own culture after spending an extended period of time in a different culture.

Almost all students and host families experience RCS to some degree. For some it is minor, and for others, it is a significant part of their return experience. Below is some information that will help answer your questions about the end of your experience. AYA recommends that you share and discuss this information with your host family.

Reverse Culture Shock (RCS)

- RCS is often overlooked or dismissed; only a few people/students expect problems readjusting to home.
- RCS is characterized by stages similar to those of culture shock.
- For many, RCS can be much more difficult than initial culture shock.
- RCS is different for everyone; the more intense the overseas experience, the more difficult RCS can be.
- RCS cannot be avoided, but it can be managed.
- RCS affects both the student and the host family before and after the student departs.

Why does RCS occur?

- People and places have changed.
- The student has changed and sees things with new eyes.
- There is a gap in information; life did not stand still, waiting for the student to return.
- People may not be as interested in hearing about the student's experiences as he/she is in sharing them.

- Few expect to have trouble adjusting to home and therefore do not prepare.
- An awareness of the feelings and behaviors most commonly associated with RCS can help you and your host family prepare for your own experience. Knowing what to expect and knowing that certain feelings are normal can make the experience less stressful and more manageable.

Typical student and host family feelings and behaviors as a result of RCS before and after departure:

- Excited to be going home.
- Sad that host family is making plans beyond your stay.
- Student and host family may withdraw from each other; it may seem easier to say goodbye if you do not feel as close.
- Confused that the host family may be pulling away from you.
- Honeymoon period initially when returning home; it is so great to be back and see everyone.
- Tendency to compare everything to the U.S.; others are not interested in these comparisons.
- "Homesick" for the U.S.
- Come to terms with being at home.
- Take the best of American culture and develop lifelong relationship with host family.

Now that you and your host family are aware of some of the typical feelings and behaviors to expect, you can work together to make RCS as painless as possible. Separation and letting go is never easy. However, with every ending comes a new beginning, and we hope your family and you feel enriched as a result of this experience.

Below are some suggested coping strategies for your family and you to utilize before and after departure. Hopefully, if you put some of these practices in place, you will be prepared to face the challenges that RCS presents.

Coping strategies for students and host families while the students are still in the U.S.:

- Recognize RCS; be aware of the typical stages.
- Prepare yourself by thinking about how you dealt with culture shock.
- Communicate. Students and host families should talk about it and discuss the inevitability of the departure. When making future plans beyond the program, acknowledge that it may be difficult for the other party to hear about it.
- Understand that the way the other is behaving may be a subconscious result of RCS.
- Students should keep in touch with family and friends back home (within reason).
- Students and host families should be aware of news, changes, and trends within the students' home community, city, and country.
- Take some time for introspection; consider how you have learned, changed, and grown from the experience.
- Compare both cultures. Students, consider what aspects of American culture you would like to take home with you. Host families, consider what aspects of the student's culture you would like to incorporate into your home.
- Bring closure to your experience; say "goodbye" and "thank you." Make plans for continuing your relationship.
- Discuss expectations for the students' return home and whether or not they are realistic.

Coping strategies for students and host families once the students have returned home:

- Be patient with yourself; adjustment takes time.
- Realize that most people will not be as interested in your experiences as you are; be sure to express interest in others' lives as well.
- Connect with other study abroad students and host families who might be going through a similar adjustment.
- Share your perspectives and expertise with community and school groups interested in learning about the U.S., American culture, or the English language.
- Host families: Share your perspectives with others about your student's country, culture, and/or language.
- Be a mentor to others who are planning to study abroad or are currently abroad.
- Find a way to incorporate your experience into your daily life.
- Students: Encourage your family to host an exchange student.
- Host families: You may want to host again, encourage others to host, or think about having your children study abroad.
- Get involved in the international community in your locale; help an exchange student or host family in your community, using the experience you gained as an exchange student or host family yourself.
- Reflect; keep a journal or make a scrapbook.
- Continue the lifelong relationship you have been building with one another through video calls, messaging, social media connection and more!



Did you know...?

- In many American families, both the mother and father work for a living.
- Children in the U.S. share chores and responsibilities at home. Anyone could be asked to do any chore, as long as it's safe and reasonable.
- Many American families are quite conservative. Most families have specific rules about curfews, dating, and chores.
- The typical American home has two or three bedrooms. Did you think most Americans live in big Hollywood mansions? The fact is, in many U.S. families, the children share bedrooms.
- American families come from diverse backgrounds. The United States is a nation of immigrants. Our grandparents may have left Europe, Africa, Central/South America, or Asia to live in the U.S. No matter where our ancestors came from, we have a lot to tell you about American culture.
- English is not always the first language spoken in an American home. One in five Americans speaks another language in their home.
- In many parts of the country, Spanish is spoken by much of the population, including students at school.
- It can take 3 months or more to start feeling comfortable in your host home and community. Patience, communication and a willingness to apply yourself are key factors to a positive experience!

Moving On

Name: _____ Student ID: _____

Complete the following sentences with your own words. You may write whatever comes to your mind.

1. When I think of leaving, I feel:

2. For me, America means:

3. The things that I will miss are:

4. The things that I will be happy to leave behind are:

5. When I talk to other exchange students about leaving, they:

6. When I talk to my American friends about leaving, they:

7. For me, the easiest part of leaving will be:

8. The most stressful part will be:

9. When I think of returning to my country, I feel:

10. I will return to the following people and activities:

11. I think my family will expect me to:

12. I expect that my friends at home will:

13. I think that the hardest part of coming back will be:

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Holidays in the United States

The following is a list of important holidays celebrated in the U.S. Most of them are unique to America. However, you may find a few that are celebrated in your home country as well.

Labor Day – Always celebrated on the first Monday in September, to honor working men and women.

Rosh Hashanah – Jewish New Year – Usually celebrated in September or October.

Yom Kippur – Jewish Day of Atonement – Is considered the holiest day in the Jewish year and is the end of 10 days of penance that begins with Rosh Hashanah.

Columbus Day – Is celebrated the second Monday in October, to mark the landing in America by Christopher Columbus on October 12, 1492.

Halloween – October 31. On this night, children—and sometimes adults—dress up in costumes and masks and go house-to-house saying “Trick or treat” in the hope that they will receive candy or other goodies. People also carve faces into pumpkins called “Jack O’ Lanterns” and put them on their doorstep.

Election Day – Is always held in November, on the first Tuesday after the first Monday. Some businesses and offices are closed for the day.

Veteran’s Day – November 11. Honors all those who have served in the Armed Forces.

Thanksgiving Day – Always celebrated the fourth Thursday in November, commemorating the first harvest by early American settlers. It also celebrates the sharing of that harvest among settlers and Native Americans.

Hanukkah – Celebrated by Jews and known as the Festival of Lights. This holiday commemorates the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem and lasts for eight days; it usually falls in December.

Christmas – December 25. A special holiday celebrating the birth of Christ. Gifts are exchanged.

New Year’s Day – January 1. The New Year concludes the winter holiday season. New Year festivities include fireworks, parties, and football games on TV.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day – Celebrated the third Monday of January. This holiday honors the major leader of the African-American non-violent Civil Rights Movement.

Valentine’s Day – February 14. A specific day to send expressions of love and affection to friends, family, loved ones, and sweethearts.

Presidents’ Day – Washington’s and Lincoln’s Birthday. Honoring the memory of two of America’s greatest presidents: George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. This holiday is celebrated on the third Monday in February.

St. Patrick’s Day – March 17. A significant day for Irish Americans to remember St. Patrick, the patron saint who converted Ireland to Christianity. Many cities and towns have a parade on this day.

April Fool’s Day – April 1. A day when people play tricks on each other and then announce, “April Fool’s!”

Good Friday – Christians observe the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the Friday before Easter.

Easter – Celebrated on the first Sunday after the full moon on or after March 21. This holiday celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Passover – A Jewish holiday, usually close to Easter, that celebrates the story of the Hebrews’ flight from Egypt and is celebrated with a Passover supper, or Seder, and specific foods.

Mother’s Day – The second Sunday in May, when mothers receive cards and/or gifts and special attention.

Memorial Day – The last Monday in May. To remember and honor deceased friends and loved ones who lost their lives during military service.

Father’s Day – The third Sunday in June. Fathers are given cards and/or gifts and special attention.

Juneteenth – June 19. Juneteenth is a federal holiday in the United States commemorating the emancipation of enslaved African Americans.

Independence Day – July 4. Commemorates the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and is celebrated with parades, fireworks, and outings.



Climates in the U.S.

The contiguous 48 states of the United States fall into five distinct climatic areas:

1. **North Pacific – Oregon and Washington**

This area of the country receives the greatest amount of precipitation, with some areas exceeding 150" (3,800 mm) annually. Most of the precipitation occurs during the winter season in the form of snow, with moderate temperatures averaging 40° F (4° C). Summer temperatures rise to about 90° (32° C), and the weather is dry.

2. **Mid Pacific and Rockies – California, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming**

This is an area of tremendous variety. Depending upon the altitude, temperatures can range from a low of -66° F (-55° C) to a high of 115° F (46° C). Average rainfall is 12" (305 mm), and the weather is usually sunny and dry.

3. **Midwest – North and South Dakota, Minnesota through Central Texas**

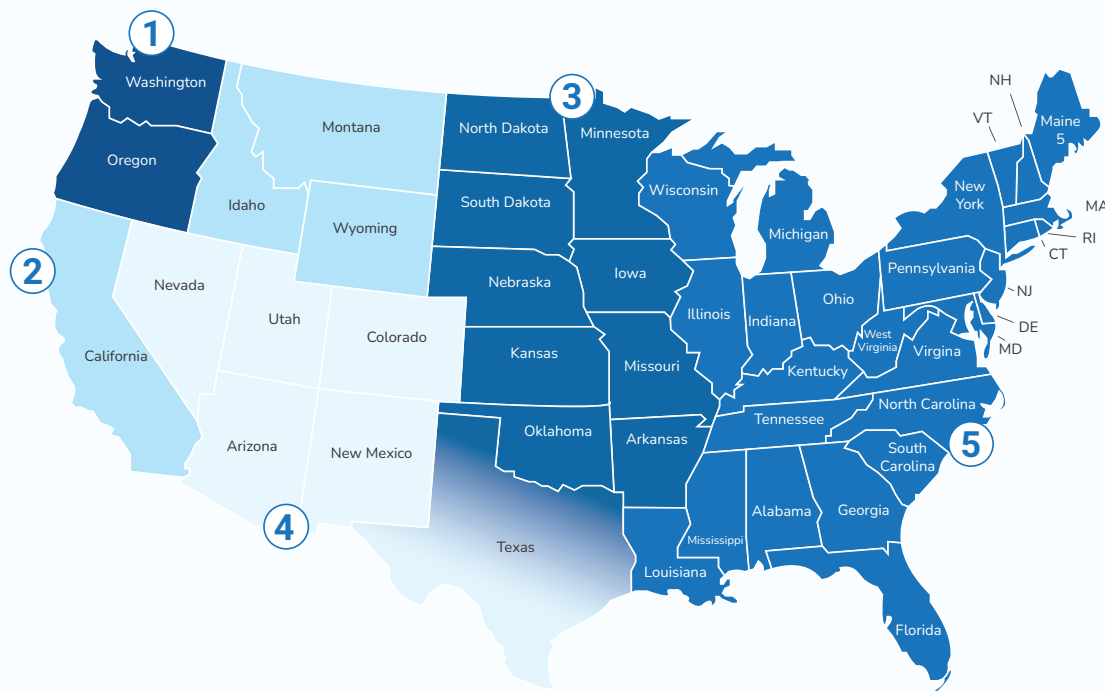
Annual precipitation varies from 23" (610 mm) to 32" (813 mm), and the rainy season occurs mainly in late spring and early summer. This is an area of great extremes — from very cold in the winter (-50° F, or -45° C) in North Dakota to very hot in the summer (115° F, or 46° C) in Texas.

4. **Southwest – Southwestern Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Southern California**

This is the driest and hottest region in the country. Precipitation averages less than 10" (254 mm) and falls mostly as summer showers. In the summer, the temperature can rise to over 110° F (43° C). Temperatures usually remain above freezing during the winter; however, there are occasional frosts in January and February.

5. **The East Coast – states east of Lake Superior to the tip of Texas**

Rainfall averages between 30" (762 mm) and 50" (1,270 mm), but precipitation occurs year-round. In the northern part of this area, snow occurs during the winter months. Generally, the summer months are sunny and warm, with temperatures in the 80°s and 90°s (27-32° C), but it can be extremely humid and uncomfortable along the Gulf of Mexico coast.



Setting up for Success!

Host Family and Student Expectations Worksheet

Setting clear expectations is the key to a successful home-stay experience for both a student and a Host Family. AYA strongly encourages host families and students to take the time to complete this worksheet together **within 72 hours** of the student's arrival. Take this opportunity to discuss personal and cultural differences and establish common goals, clear expectations, and a strong foundation for success!

Make sure that everyone understands what is expected of them, and that notes are written clearly and in language that everyone can understand. Choose a central location and post the completed worksheet in a visible location so everyone remembers what was discussed.

Meals

	Time	Eaten Together/Eaten Individually	Comments
Breakfast	_____	_____	_____
Lunch	_____	_____	_____
Dinner	_____	_____	_____
Snacks	_____	_____	_____

School Lunch

Does student take a lunch or buy it? _____
(Reminder, student pays for lunch if choosing to buy. HF pays if requiring student to buy)

Who makes lunch if taken from the house? _____

Where can food be eaten in the home?

Are there any rooms in which food cannot be eaten? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, which rooms? _____

Does the student or family have any food allergies or dietary restrictions? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, what are they? _____

If the student wishes to purchase specialized food that the host family would not typically buy, who should they organize this with, how should they pay for the food, and where should it be stored?

Laundry

Has the student been taught how to use your washer/dryer yet? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Where should dirty clothes be placed? _____

Are there set days when laundry is to be done? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, what days? _____

Who is responsible for sorting, washing, drying, folding, ironing, hand washing? _____

Smartphones and Electronics

Is there a specific place where electronics are kept to charge overnight? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What are the appropriate times for phone calls? _____

What are the inappropriate times for phone calls? _____

Can the student bring their cell phone to school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How will the student pay for their cell phone plan? (Reminder, to simplify relationships, students should not be added to a family plan)

Are there restrictions on cell phone usage, including texting, social media, etc.? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what are the rules? _____

What are the appropriate times for electronics usage? _____

What are the inappropriate times for electronics usage? _____

Are there restrictions regarding websites, downloading, and information sharing (like location)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what are the restrictions? _____

What should the student know about internet safety and protecting the privacy of the student and family?

AYA recommends that communication with friends and family back home should be limited to a reasonable amount (recommended once a week) to help avoid hindering adjustment and increasing homesickness.

Student Room

Can the student put pictures on the wall? ☐ Yes ☐ No

With nails?

With tape?

Other?

Can the furniture arrangement be changed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Who cleans? _____

How often? _____

Bathroom

Has the student been taught how the faucets and fixtures work yet? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Where does the student's towel go? _____

Where should the student's toiletries be placed? _____

Are toiletries to be shared? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Is there a limit on showers? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how many per day? _____

If yes, what is the time limit? _____

Is there a scheduled morning/evening bathroom time for the student? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what is it _____

How should the bathroom be left? (i.e., door open, bath mat on rack) _____

Household Chores

Who sets the table, clears the table, does dishes, cooks meals? _____

Who cleans up after snacks? _____

Who tidies up the bathroom? _____ How often? _____

What other chores will the student be expected to share? _____

Household Rules

How should student proceed when scheduling activities? _____

Should student get host parent permission? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How do you organize and share information about schedules, events, etc? _____

Are there days or times when activities are not allowed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what days? _____

How far in advance does the student need to notify you of plans outside the home? _____

How far in advance should the student request a ride/transportation to and from an activity or event? _____

Is student allowed to ride in cars driven by teenage drivers? ☐ Yes ☐ No

(Reminder, students are not permitted to use ride-hailing services like Uber or Lyft without a host parent)

With permission? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Without permission? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does student need permission to stay after school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Can the student invite friends over? ☐ Yes ☐ No

With permission? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Without permission? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How much notice? _____

Can the student go out with friends during the week? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, when? _____

Can the student go out with friends on weekends? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, when? _____

What is the student's curfew on weekdays? _____ Weekends? _____

Does the student need to contact host parents if plans change? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does Host Family need to know where student is at all times? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How will student be required to notify host parents of whereabouts/change of plans?

☐ Phone call

☐ Text message

Are there certain family activities the student will be expected to participate in? ☐ Yes ☐ No

(For example, sporting events, community events, game night)

If yes, what events? _____

Dating Rules

What are the rules regarding dating? _____

What are the rules regarding spending time with a potential date inside and outside of the home? _____

Are there any dating restrictions? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what are the restrictions? _____

Religious Services

Do family members participate in weekly services? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what time? _____

Do family members participate in other regular religious services? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, when? _____

Do family members participate in youth group activities? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, when? _____

Does the student wish to attend with family ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, how often? _____

Does the student wish to attend a different religious service? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Who will provide transportation? _____

Do all parties understand that the student and family
do not necessarily share the same faith or belief systems? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do all parties understand that despite differing beliefs,
all should be respectful and open to learning and observing different faiths? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How will you handle differences in faith? (Discussion, taking turns going to services, compromise) _____

Who Pays

When the family goes to the movies, bowling, sight-seeing, etc.? _____

When the family plans a trip or vacation? _____

Remember, AYA students are not expected to pay for food (except for specialty snacks or foods the Host Family does not normally eat, hot lunch at school if the student does not wish to take a packed lunch from home) gas, tolls, or utilities.

Travel & Holidays

Is the Host Family planning on traveling during the year? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does the Host Family observe certain traditions during holidays? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what are they? _____

Student Safety

Is there anything the student should know about the safe or less safe areas of this part of town? _____

Are there any areas to avoid walking in or going to during the day and/or night? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what areas? _____

How should an emergency or fire be handled? _____

What are the phone numbers of related emergency services? _____

Emergencies: 911

Police Department: _____ Fire Department: _____

Hospital: _____

How does the Host Family secure the home?

☐ Locking all doors and windows ☐ Alarm system

Are there any special safety precautions that the student needs to take related to closing/locking certain doors, house keys, etc.?

If home alone, how should the student handle phone calls or someone at the door? _____

What should the student know about traffic and pedestrian safety? _____

What should the student do if they get lost or don't have a key and nobody's home? _____

Are there any activities, people, or places the student should avoid? _____

What should the student do if they are out with friends and find themselves in an unsafe situation?
(underaged drinking, drugs, risky behaviors)

Are all parties aware that drinking alcohol is strictly prohibited according to U.S. law and AYA program rules and is not permitted under any circumstance, in or outside of the home? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are all parties aware that AYA is a non-smoking program and that students are prohibited from possessing or smoking vapes, e-cigarettes, or cigarettes while on-program? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Have all parties been made aware of safety precautions related to sexual abuse and exploitation? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What should the student do if they are ever the subject of any type of misconduct, physical, sexual, or otherwise, including lewd or inappropriate solicitations via phone, text, email, or social media communication?

Communication

Student: What is the best way for your host family to address unmet expectations with you?

Host Family: What is the best way for your student to ask for help, clarification, or support from you?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

Rights vs. Privileges Quiz

Please indicate whether you think the expectations below are your right to be provided as an exchange student or a privilege. A right is something that is guaranteed to you, and privileges are opportunities that are earned.

	Right	Privilege
Living with a caring host family		
Living in a safe and suitable home		
Being enrolled in a high school		
Being provided 3 meals a day		
Lunch money for hot lunch at school		
Your own room		
Your own bed		
Unlimited cell phone usage and access		
Being provided with a place to study		
Participating in school sports		
Receiving a high school diploma		
Taking Trips with host family		
Placement in grade level of choice		
Computer usage for social purposes (Skyping with friends)		
Unlimited internet usage		
Going out with friends during the week		
Participating in graduation		
Your own bathroom		
Being driven to and from school by your host family		
Transportation to and from social activities		
Transportation to and from school and religious services		
Staying out late with friends		
Reasonable access to internet or phone to contact AYA, LC, natural parents, or DOS		
Having every meal prepared for you by your host family		

Rights vs. Privileges Quiz Answers

Answer Key and Explanations

	Right	Privilege
Living with a caring host family	✓	
Living in a safe and suitable home	✓	
Being enrolled in a high school	✓	
Being provided 3 meals a day	✓	
Lunch money for hot lunch at school		✓
Your own room		✓
Your own bed	✓	
Unlimited cell phone usage and access		✓
Being provided with a place to study	✓	
Participating in school sports		✓
Receiving a high school diploma		✓
Taking Trips with host family		✓
Placement in grade level of choice		✓
Computer usage for social purposes (Skyping with friends)		✓
Unlimited internet usage		✓
Going out with friends during the week		✓
Participating in graduation		✓
Your own bathroom		✓
Being driven to and from school by your host family		✓
Transportation to and from social activities		✓
Transportation to and from school and religious services	✓	
Staying out late with friends		✓
Reasonable access to internet or phone to contact AYA, LC, natural parents, or DOS	✓	
Having every meal prepared for you by your host family		✓



Explanation of Rights and Privileges:

- **Living with a caring host family:** You have the right to be with a caring host family that will welcome you as part of their family and invite you to participate in family life. Your host family will fulfill all the provisions required by AYA and help you to succeed and enjoy a year or semester in America. It is important to remember that each host family is different, and your American host family may not demonstrate affection in the same way that your natural family does back home. Each family dynamic is unique, and you will need to be patient. It may take some time to become fully integrated into the family.
- **Living in a safe and suitable home:** You have the right to be with a host family that provides you with a safe, sanitary, and suitable home. AYA host families are thoroughly screened and required to provide you with suitable sleeping and living arrangements that meet AYA and Department of State regulations.
- **Being enrolled in a high school:** You have the right to be enrolled in an accredited public or private school while on the AYA program. Students enroll in full course loads and must maintain a C+ grade point average in every class.
- **Meals:** You have the right to be provided with three quality meals per day. If you wish to purchase a hot lunch at school this is considered a personal expense, and you will be responsible for paying for it. Your host family is only obligated to make sure that there is food in the home and that it is available to you. For example, a lot of host families will provide you with different breakfast options – like toast, spreads, cereal, cereal bars, etc. This means that you may have to prepare some of your own meals, including packing your own lunch for school.
- **Sleeping Arrangements:** You have the right to your own bed; however, it is a privilege for you to be given your own room. If you are sharing a room, it is regulation that you do not share a room with more than one other child of the same gender who is relatively close to your age.
- **Bathroom:** Being provided with your own bathroom is a privilege, and many American families share one or two bathrooms amongst each other.
- **Be provided with a place to study:** You have the right to be provided a quiet place to study – this can be a desk in your room or quiet places in your host family's home, like the kitchen table or living room.



- **Sports and other high school events:** Your ability to participate in sports varies from school to school. AYA does not guarantee participation in sports. AYA also does not guarantee grade assignments, receipt of a diploma, or participation in graduation ceremonies.
- **Taking trips with host family:** It is a privilege to go on trips with your host family. Your host family is not responsible for planning or taking you on trips. It is encouraged for you to take advantage of the activities and sights in your host community.
- **Internet and cell phone access and usage:** It is your right to be provided with reasonable access to internet or phone. This means that if necessary, you will be able to contact AYA, your LC, your natural parents, or the Department of State. It is a privilege, however, to have unrestricted social and entertainment time on your phone or other devices. Your host family may have an electronics curfew or ask you to leave your devices in a common space overnight.
- **Going out with friends:** It is a privilege to be able to go out with friends during the week and stay out late with them. Every host family has different rules about going out with friends during the week and weekends. It is important that you follow these rules and communicate with your host family.
- **Transportation for social activities:** Host families are expected to provide transportation to and from some activities, with proper planning ahead of time. It is your responsibility to arrange transportation to extra-curricular school activities or outings with friends if you do not provide proper planning to your host family, or if they are unable to accommodate your schedule. You can also carpool with your friend's family to events.
- **Transportation to and from school and religious services:** It is your right to have transportation to and from school; this means a way of getting to school which could include riding a bicycle, walking, taking a school bus, or being driven by a host parent or sibling. Many of our students take the school bus or walk to school. It is also your right to be provided with transportation to religious services (within reason) if you choose to attend.

Reprint from the Code of Federal Regulations

Washington, D.C. 20547
Criteria for Exchange Teenager
Program sec. 22 CFR 62.25 Secondary
school students

PART 62—EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM

■ 1. The Authority citation for part 62 is revised to read as follows:

Authority: 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(15)(J), 1182, 1184, 1258; 22 U.S.C. 1431–1442, 2451 et seq.; Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998, Pub. L. 105–277, Div. G, 112 Stat. 2681 et seq.; Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1977, 3 CFR, 1977 Comp. p. 200; E.O. 12048 of March 27, 1978; 3 CFR, 1978 Comp. p. 168; the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, Pub. L. 104–208, Div. C, 110 Stat. 3009–546, as amended; Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (USA PATRIOT ACT) (Pub. L. 107–56), Section 416, 115 Stat. 354; and the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002, Pub. L. 107–173; 116 Stat. 543.

■ 2. Section 62.25 is revised to read as follows:

§ 62.25 Secondary school students.

(a) **Purpose.** This section governs Department of State designated exchange visitor programs under which foreign secondary school students are afforded the opportunity to study in the United States at accredited public or private secondary schools for an academic semester or an academic year, while living with American host families or residing at accredited U.S. boarding schools.

(b) **Program sponsor eligibility.** Eligibility for designation as a secondary school student exchange visitor program sponsor is limited to organizations:

(1) With tax-exempt status as conferred by the Internal Revenue Service pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; and

(2) Which are United States citizens as such term is defined in § 62.2.

(c) **Program eligibility.** Secondary school student exchange visitor programs designated by the Department of State must:

(1) Require all exchange students to be enrolled and participating in a full course of study at an accredited academic institution;

(2) Allow entry of exchange students for not less than one academic semester (or quarter equivalency) and not more than two academic semesters (or quarter equivalency) duration; and

(3) Ensure that the program is conducted on a U.S. academic calendar year basis, except for students from countries whose academic year is opposite that of the United States. Exchange students may begin an exchange program in the second semester of a U.S. academic year only if specifically permitted to do so, in writing, by the school in which the exchange student is enrolled. In all cases, sponsors must notify both the host family and school prior to the exchange student's arrival in the United States whether the placement is for an academic semester, an academic year, or a calendar year.

(d) **Program administration.** Sponsors must ensure that all organizational officers, employees, representatives, agents, and volunteers acting on their behalf:

(1) Are adequately trained. Sponsors must administer training for Local Coordinators that specifically includes, at a minimum, instruction in: Conflict resolution; procedures for handling and reporting emergency situations; awareness or knowledge of child safety standards; information on sexual conduct codes; procedures for handling and reporting allegations of sexual misconduct or any other allegations of abuse or neglect; and the criteria to be used to screen potential host families and exercise good judgment when identifying what constitutes suitable host family placements. In addition to their own training, sponsors must ensure that all Local Coordinators complete the Department of State mandated training module prior to their appointment as a Local Coordinator or assumption of duties. The Department of State training module will include instruction designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Exchange Visitor Program; its public diplomacy objectives; and the Secondary School Student category rules and regulations. Sponsors must demonstrate the individual's successful completion of all initial training requirements and that annual refresher training is also successfully completed.

(2) Are adequately supervised. Sponsors must create and implement organization-specific standard operating procedures for the supervision of Local Coordinators designed to prevent or deter fraud, abuse, or misconduct in the performance of the duties of these employees/agents/volunteers. They must also have sufficient internal controls to ensure that such employees/agents/volunteers comply with such standard operating procedures.

(3) Have been vetted annually through a criminal background check (which must include a search of the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Registry);

(4) Place no exchange student with his or her relatives;

(5) Make no exchange student placement beyond 120 miles of the home of the Local Coordinator authorized to act on the sponsor's behalf in both routine and emergency matters arising from that exchange student's participation in the Exchange Visitor Program;

(6) Make no monetary payments or other incentives to host families;

(7) Provide exchange students with reasonable access to their natural parents and family by telephone and email;

(8) Make certain that the exchange student's government issued documents (i.e., passports, Forms DS–2019) are not removed from his/her possession;

(9) Conduct the host family orientation after the host family has been fully vetted and accepted;

(10) Refrain, without exception, from acting as:

(i) Both a host family and a Local Coordinator or area supervisor for an exchange student;

(ii) A host family for one sponsor and a Local Coordinator for another sponsor; or

(iii) A Local Coordinator for any exchange student over whom he/she has a position of trust or authority such as the student's teacher or principal. This requirement is not applicable to a boarding school placement.

(11) Maintain, at minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the exchange student. The first monthly contact between the Local Coordinator and the exchange student must be in person. All other contacts may take place in person, on the phone, or via electronic mail and must be properly documented. The sponsor is responsible for ensuring that issues raised through such contacts are promptly and appropriately addressed.

(12) That a sponsor representative other than the Local Coordinator who recruited, screened and selected the host family visit the exchange student/host family home within the first or second month following the student's placement in the home.

(13) Maintain, at a minimum, a monthly

schedule of personal contact with the host family. At least once during the fall semester and at least once during the spring semester, (i.e., twice during the academic year) the contact by the Local Coordinator with the host family must be in person. All other contacts may take place in person, on the phone, or via electronic mail and must be properly documented. The sponsor is responsible for ensuring the issues raised through such contacts are promptly and appropriately addressed.

(14) That host schools are provided contact information for the local organizational representative (including name, direct phone number, and email address), the program sponsor, and the Department's Office of Designation; and

(15) Adhere to all regulatory provisions set forth in this Part and all additional terms and conditions governing program administration that the Department may impose.

(e) **Student selection.** In addition to satisfying the requirements of § 62.10(a), sponsors must ensure that all participants in a designated secondary school student exchange visitor program:

(1) Are secondary school students in their home countries who have not completed more than 11 years of primary and secondary study, exclusive of kindergarten; or are at least 15 years of age, but not more than 18 years and six months of age as of the program start date;

(2) Demonstrate maturity, good character, and scholastic aptitude; and

(3) Have not previously participated in an academic year or semester secondary school student exchange program in the United States or attended school in the United States in either F–1 or J–1 visa status.

(f) **Student enrollment.** (1) Sponsors must secure prior written acceptance for the enrollment of any exchange student in a United States public or private secondary school. Such prior acceptance must:

(i) Be secured from the school principal or other authorized school administrator of the school or school system that the exchange student will attend; and

(ii) Include written arrangements concerning the payment of tuition or waiver thereof if applicable.

(2) Under no circumstance may a sponsor facilitate the entry into the United States of an exchange student for whom a written school placement has not been secured.

(3) Under no circumstance may a sponsor charge a student private school tuition if such arrangements are not finalized in writing prior to the issuance of Form DS–2019.

(4) Sponsors must maintain copies of all written acceptances for a minimum of three years and make such documents available for Department of State inspection upon request.

(5) Sponsors must provide the school with a translated “written English language summary” of the exchange student's complete academic course work prior to commencement of school, in addition to any additional documents the school may require. Sponsors must inform the prospective host school of any student who has completed secondary school in his/her home country.

(6) Sponsors may not facilitate the enrollment of more than five exchange students in one school unless the school itself has requested, in writing, the placement of more than five students from the sponsor.

(7) Upon issuance of a Form DS–2019 to a prospective participant, the sponsor accepts full responsibility for securing a school and host family placement for the student, except in cases of voluntary student withdrawal or visa denial.

(g) **Student orientation.** In addition to the orientation requirements set forth at § 62.10, all sponsors must provide exchange students, prior to their departure from their home countries, with the following information:

(1) A summary of all operating procedures,

rules, and regulations governing student participation in the exchange visitor program along with a detailed summary of travel arrangements;

(2) A copy of the Department's welcome letter to exchange students;

(3) Age and language appropriate information on how to identify and report sexual abuse or exploitation;

(4) A detailed profile of the host family with whom the exchange student will be placed. The profile must state whether the host family is either a permanent placement or a temporary arrival family;

(5) A detailed profile of the school and community in which the exchange student will be placed. The profile must state whether the student will pay tuition; and

(6) An identification card, that lists the exchange student's name, United States host family placement address and telephone numbers (landline and cellular), sponsor name and main office and emergency telephone numbers, name and telephone numbers (landline and cellular) of the Local Coordinator and area representative, the telephone number of Department's Office of Designation, and the Secondary School Student program toll free emergency telephone number. The identification card must also contain the name of the health insurance provider and policy number. Such cards must be corrected, reprinted, and reissued to the student if changes in contact information occur due to a change in the student's placement.

(h) **Student extra-curricular activities.** Exchange students may participate in school sanctioned and sponsored extracurricular activities, including athletics, if such participation is:

(1) Authorized by the local school district in which the student is enrolled; and

(2) Authorized by the state authority responsible for determination of athletic eligibility, if applicable. Sponsors shall not knowingly be party to a placement (inclusive of direct placements) based on athletic abilities, whether initiated by a student, a natural or host family, a school, or any other interested party.

(3) Any placement in which either the student or the sending organization in the foreign country is party to an arrangement with any other party, including receiving school personnel, whereby the student will attend a particular school or live with a particular host family must be reported to the particular school and the National Federation of State High School Associations prior to the first day of classes.

(i) **Student employment.** Exchange students may not be employed on either a full or part-time basis but may accept sporadic or intermittent employment such as babysitting or yard work.

(j) **Host family application and selection.** Sponsors must adequately screen and select all potential host families and at a minimum must:

(1) Provide potential host families with a detailed summary of the Exchange Visitor Program and of their requirements, obligations and commitment to host;

(2) Utilize a standard application form developed by the sponsor that includes, at a minimum, all data fields provided in Appendix F, “Information to be Collected on Secondary School Student Host Family Applications”. The form must include a statement stating that: “The income data collected will be used solely for the purposes of determining that the basic needs of the exchange student can be met, including three quality meals and transportation to and from school activities.” Such application form must be signed and dated at the time of application by all potential host family applicants. The host family application must be designed to provide a detailed summary and profile of the host family, the physical home

environment (to include photographs of the host family home's exterior and grounds, kitchen, student's bedroom, bathroom, and family or living room), family composition, and community environment. Exchange students are not permitted to reside with their relatives.

(3) Conduct an in-person interview with all family members residing in the home where the student will be living;

(4) Ensure that the host family is capable of providing a comfortable and nurturing home environment and that the home is clean and sanitary; that the exchange student's bedroom contains a separate bed for the student that is neither convertible nor inflatable in nature; and that the student has adequate storage space for clothes and personal belongings, reasonable access to bathroom facilities, study space if not otherwise available in the house and reasonable, unimpeded access to the outside of the house in the event of a fire or similar emergency. An exchange student may share a bedroom, but with no more than one other individual of the same sex.

(5) Ensure that the host family has a good reputation and character by securing two personal references from within the community from individuals who are not relatives of the potential host family or representatives of the sponsor (i.e., field staff or volunteers), attesting to the host family's good reputation and character;

(6) Ensure that the host family has adequate financial resources to undertake hosting obligations and is not receiving needs-based government subsidies for food or housing;

(7) Verify that each member of the host family household 18 years of age and older, as well as any new adult member added to the household, or any member of the host family household who will turn eighteen years of age during the exchange student's stay in that household, has undergone a criminal background check (which must include a search of the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Registry);

(8) Maintain a record of all documentation on a student's exchange program, including but not limited to application forms, background checks, evaluations, and interviews, for all selected host families for a period of three years following program completion; and

(9) Ensure that a potential single adult host parent without a child in the home undergoes a secondary level review by an organizational representative other than the individual who recruited and selected the applicant. Such secondary review should include demonstrated evidence of the individual's friends or family who can provide an additional support network for the exchange student and evidence of the individual's ties to his/her community. Both the exchange student and his or her natural parents must agree in writing in advance of the student's placement with a single adult host parent without a child in the home.

(k) *Host family orientation.* In addition to the orientation requirements set forth in § 62.10, sponsors must:

(1) Inform all host families of the philosophy, rules, and regulations governing the sponsor's exchange visitor program, including examples of "best practices" developed by the exchange community;

(2) Provide all selected host families with a copy of the Department's letter of appreciation to host families;

(3) Provide all selected host families with a copy of Department of State promulgated Exchange Visitor Program regulations;

(4) Advise all selected host families of strategies for cross-cultural interaction and conduct workshops to familiarize host families with cultural differences and practices; and

(5) Advise host families of their responsibility to inform the sponsor of any and all material changes in the status of the host family or student, including, but not limited to, changes in address, finances, employment and criminal arrests.

(l) *Host family placement.* (1) Sponsors must secure, prior to the student's departure from his or her home country, a permanent or arrival host family placement for each exchange student participant. Sponsors may not:

(i) Facilitate the entry into the United States of an exchange student for whom a host family placement has not been secured;

(ii) Place more than one exchange student with a host family without the express prior written consent of the host family, the natural parents, and the students being placed. Under no circumstance may more than two exchange students be placed with a host family, or in the home of a Local Coordinator, regional coordinator, or volunteer. Sponsors may not place students from the same countries or with the same native languages in a single home.

(2) Prior to the student's departure from his or her home country, sponsors must advise both the exchange student and host family, in writing, of the respective family compositions and backgrounds of each, whether the host family placement is a permanent or arrival placement, and facilitate and encourage the exchange of correspondence between the two.

(3) In the event of unforeseen circumstances that necessitate a change of host family placement, the sponsor must document the reason(s) necessitating such change and provide the Department of State with an annual statistical summary reflecting the number and reason(s) for such change in host family placement in the program's annual report.

(m) *Advertising and Marketing for the recruitment of host families.* In addition to the requirements set forth in § 62.9 in advertising and promoting for host family recruiting, sponsors must:

(1) Utilize only promotional materials that professionally, ethically, and accurately reflect the sponsor's purposes, activities, and sponsorship;

(2) Not publicize the need for host families via any public media with announcements, notices, advertisements, etc. that are not sufficiently in advance of the exchange student's arrival, appeal to public pity or guilt, imply in any way that an exchange student will be denied participation if a host family is not found immediately, or identify photos of individual exchange students and include an appeal for an immediate family;

(3) Not promote or recruit for their programs in any way that compromises the privacy, safety or security of participants, families, or schools. Specifically, sponsors shall not include personal student data or contact information (including addresses, phone numbers or email addresses) or photographs of the student on Web sites or in other promotional materials; and

(4) Ensure that access to exchange student photographs and personally identifying information, either online or in print form, is only made available to potential host families who have been fully vetted and selected for program participation. Such information, if available online, must also be password protected.

(n) *Reporting requirements.* Along with the annual report required by regulations set forth at § 62.15, sponsors must file with the Department of State the following information:

(1) Sponsors must immediately report to the Department any incident or allegation involving the actual or alleged sexual exploitation or any other allegations of abuse or neglect of an exchange student. Sponsors must also report such allegations as required by local or state statute or regulation. Failure to report such incidents to the Department and, as required by state law or regulation, to local law enforcement authorities shall be grounds for the suspension and revocation of the sponsor's Exchange Visitor Program designation;

(2) A report of all final academic year and semester program participant placements by August 31 for the upcoming academic year or

January 15 for the Spring semester and calendar year. The report must be in the format directed by the Department and must include at a minimum, the exchange student's full name, Form DS-2019 number (SEVIS ID #), host family placement (current U.S. address), school (site of activity) address, the Local Coordinator's name and zip code, and other information the Department may request; and

(3) A report of all situations which resulted in the placement of an exchange student with more than one host family or in more than one school. The report must be in a format directed by the Department and include, at a minimum, the exchange student's full name, Form DS-2019 number (SEVIS ID #), host family placements (current U.S. address), schools (site of activity address), the reason for the change in placement, and the date of the move. This report is due by July 31 for the previous academic school year.

A new Appendix F is added to Part 62, as follows:

Appendix F to Part 62—Information To Be Collected on Secondary School Student Host Family Applications

Basic Family Information:

a. Host Family Member—Full name and relationship (children and adults) either living full-time or part-time in the home or who frequently stay at the home)

b. Date of Birth (DOB) of all family members

c. Street Address

d. Contact information (telephone; email address) of host parents

e. Employment—employer name, job title, and point of contact for each working resident of the home

f. Is the residence the site of a functioning business? (e.g., daycare, farm)

g. Description of each household member (e.g., level of education, profession, interests, community involvement, and relevant behavioral or other characteristics of such household members that could affect the successful integration of the exchange visitor into the household)

h. Has any member of your household ever been charged with any crime? Household Pets:

a. Number of Pets

b. Type of Pets

Financial Resources:

a. Average Annual Income Range: Less than \$25,000; \$25,000–\$35,000; \$35,000–\$45,000; \$45,000–\$55,000; \$55,000–\$65,000; \$65,000–\$75,000; and \$75,000 and above. Note: The form must include a statement stating that: "The income data collected will be used solely for the purposes of ensuring that the basic needs of the exchange students can be met, including three quality meals and transportation to and from school activities"

b. Describe if anyone residing in the home receives any kind of public assistance (financial needs-based government subsidies for food or housing)

c. Identify those personal expenses expected to be covered by the student Diet:

a. Does anyone in the family follow any dietary restrictions? (Y/N) If yes, describe:

b. Do you expect the student to follow any dietary restrictions? (Y/N) If yes, describe:

c. Would you feel comfortable hosting a student who follows a particular dietary restriction (ex. Vegetarian, Vegan, etc.)? (Y/N)

d. Would the family provide three (3) square meals daily?

High School Information:

a. Name and address of school (private or public school)

b. Name, address, email and telephone number of school official

c. Approximate size of the school student body

d. Approximate distance between the school and your home

e. Approximate start date of the school year

f. How will the exchange student get to the school (e.g. bus, carpool, walk)?

g. Would the family provide special transportation for extracurricular activities after school or in the evenings, if required?

h. Which, if any, of your family's children, presently attend the school in which the exchange visitor is enrolled?

If applicable list sports/clubs/activities, if any, your child(ren) participate(s) in at the school

i. Does any member of your household work for the high school in a coaching/teaching/or administrative capacity?

j. Has any member of your household had contact with a coach regarding the hosting of an exchange student with particular athletic ability?

If yes, please describe the contact and sport. Community Information:

a. In what type of community do you live (e.g.: Urban, Suburban, Rural, Farm)

b. Population of community

c. Nearest Major City (Distance and population)

d. Nearest Airport (Distance)

e. City or town website

f. Briefly describe your neighborhood and community

g. What points of interest are near your area (parks, museums, historical sites)?

h. Areas in or near neighborhood to be avoided?

Home Description:

a. Describe your type of home (e.g. single family home, condominium, duplex, apartment, mobile home) and include photographs of the host family home's exterior and grounds, kitchen, student's bedroom, student's bathroom, and family and living areas.

b. Describe Primary Rooms and Bedrooms

c. Number of Bathrooms

d. Will the exchange student share a bedroom? (Y/N) If yes, with which household resident?

e. Describe the student's bedroom

f. Describe amenities to which the student has access

g. Utilities

Family Activities:

a. Language spoken in home

b. Please describe activities and/or sports each family member participates in: (e.g., camping, hiking, dance, crafts, debate, drama, art, music, reading, soccer, baseball, horseback riding)

c. Describe your expectations regarding the responsibilities and behavior of the student while in your home (e.g., homework, household chores, curfew (school night and weekend), access to refrigerator and food, drinking of alcoholic beverages, driving, smoking, computer/Internet/Email)

Would you be willing voluntarily to inform the exchange visitor in advance of any religious affiliations of household members? (Y/N)

Would any member of the household have difficulty hosting a student whose religious beliefs were different from their own? (Y/N)

Note: A host family may want the exchange visitor to attend one or more religious services or programs with the family. The exchange visitor cannot be required to do so, but may decide to experience this facet of U.S. culture at his or her discretion.

How did you learn about being a host family?

References:

Dated: October 21, 2010

Sally J. Lawrence,

*Director, Office of Designation,
Bureau of Educational and Cultural
Affairs, Department of State.*

[FR Doc. 2010-27200 Filed 10-26-10; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4710-05-P



U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
Private Sector Exchange



January 3, 2025

Dear Secondary School Student:

Welcome to the U.S. Department of State's BridgeUSA Exchange Visitor Program! This is the beginning of an exciting adventures in your life. During your time in the United States, you will obtain an American high school education and experience life as part of an American family. You will make friendships that will last a lifetime, get lots of practice in speaking English, and partake in family traditions. Since 1949, thousands of students from around the world have come to share their language, culture, and customs with their American host families, American schools, and the broader local community. Your participation in this exchange program fosters a greater understanding between our two countries and works towards peaceful relations throughout the world.

We want you to have a meaningful and successful experience. Your new school and host family may have different rules and ways of life from what you are used to, so keeping an open mind will be very important to your success. Your goal should be to learn as much as you can about American customs, values, and culture and to build strong relationships with your host family, classmates, and friends.

Your U.S. sponsor is your first point of contact throughout your stay in the United States. Their information is identified on your Form DS-2019, Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Program (J-1) Status. If you have any questions about your exchange program or need assistance of any kind while you are here, immediately contact your U.S. sponsor. It is their responsibility to help you with any problems, needs, or concerns you may have. Their emergency telephone contact number can be found in your program orientation materials and identification card, and is available to you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Add this phone number to your contact list.

If you have concerns and/or issues that your U.S. sponsor has not resolved, or you find you cannot reach your sponsor, please contact the Department of State through our J-1 Visa Emergency Helpline 1-866-283-9090, which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or by e-mail at JVisas@state.gov. Please add the helpline number and the email address to your contacts to ensure you receive important communications from the Department. Your sponsor and the Department of State are here to ensure your success and safety on the program.

We are pleased that you made the decision to study in the United States and hope you enjoy your stay.

Sincerely,

Rebecca A. Pasini
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Private Sector Exchange

Emergency Contact Information

Please complete the following worksheet with your host family and/or Local Coordinator. It is important that you keep emergency contact information with you at all times.

AYA National Office: 800.322.4678 | **AYA Emergency Hotline (24/7):** 877.240.5225 | **Email:** ayainfo@aifs.org

Your Host Family:

Me: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Mobile Phone: _____ Email: _____

Your Local Coordinator:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Mobile Phone: _____ Email: _____

Alternate Emergency Contact:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Mobile Phone: _____ Email: _____

Local Police:

Emergency: 911

Non-emergency: _____ Local Fire Department: _____

Local Urgent Care Clinic:

Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Local Hospital:

Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Other resources:

U.S Department of State Emergency hotline: 1.866.283.9090

National Sexual Assault Crisis Hotline: 800.656.HOPE (4673) (FREE & CONFIDENTIAL)



1 High Ridge Park,
Stamford, CT 06905
Toll free: 800.322.HOST (4678)
Direct: 203.399.5417
AcademicYear.org

