

THE GUIDE

STUDENT EDITION



YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING
Intercultural Exchange Programs

MAKE THE WORLD
YOUR HOME.

YFU ADVANCES INTERCULTURAL
UNDERSTANDING, MUTUAL RESPECT,
AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THROUGH
EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES FOR YOUTH,
FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES.

Congratulations! You are about to have one of the most exciting and hopefully one of the best times of your life – the YFU exchange experience!

The Guide – Student Edition has been developed by YFU to help you have many amazing learning opportunities in a different country and culture. This guide is not meant to be a brochure for a vacation or a tour. The main purpose is to introduce you to the diversity of a new and different culture, and to give you useful tools to cope with situations you might face during your exchange.

This guide will not be just a “book of rules” telling you how to be an exchange student. Instead it is a useful and comprehensive reference on how to make the most of your time abroad.

You will, however, find some things that are important to know, such as YFU program policies and how to follow the law in your host country. As a YFU exchange student you are expected to follow YFU rules. This is important to remember while living abroad, so you can have the best experience possible.

So read on! The Guide – Student Edition will give you information about YFU, different cultures and approaches, the meaning of being an exchange student, and important program rules.

And don't forget to....make the world your home!

Having fun during your exchange is up to you!



EXPECTATIONS BEFORE DEPARTURE

NOT GOOD OR BAD, JUST DIFFERENT!

Everyone forms a first impression of their host community even before being physically there. Your exchange experience does not begin the day you step off the plane; it really starts while you are preparing to go abroad. It is okay to have many doubts running through your head. Only if you are aware of all your questions can you be prepared for the extraordinary adventure of being an exchange student.

The experience of living in another country is a very special opportunity. The greater the difference, the more challenging the experience will be. Many things will be unfamiliar to you, but there will always be time to learn how to handle the differences. Your expectations of your host country might be different from what you expect: it may not be like what you have seen in the media or heard from friends and family.

“Sometimes I feel that, perhaps, I was a little too lucky. In Switzerland, I found myself in one of the most beautiful regions, called the Engadin Valley. I live in this little village of Pontresina (perhaps you know St. Moritz, our neighbor) where it was already snowing in mid-September! It is this valley which you saw in the posters of Switzerland Tourism: the little red trains moving along the snow clad glaciers, into little tunnels over those lofty bridges. This is the place which makes you wonder sometimes: ‘Can actually there be such a place?’ This is the place where everything: the Holz houses (wooden house), the silver forests, the red trains, the people greeting you with ‘Grüezi’ (welcome) and ‘Buena sera’ (good evening). Here the people speak Reto Romanisch. The tunnels, the streets, the air, everything to me feels like chocolate; incredibly sweet and adorable!” --Jyotsna from India (exchange to Switzerland)

Be positive! Your mind-set before departure makes a big difference!

It is important to keep in mind that you should not have preconceived notions. If you think everything will be great, you could be disappointed. The new culture may not measure up to your expectations. On the other hand, thinking that everything is going to be hard and scary may mean you are unlikely to take any chances or seek out opportunities to meet different people and participate in activities. You could

then be frustrated when it takes longer to understand the new culture.

Your exchange will be life changing! YOU are the one who will make the most of your experience. You should contribute to the outcome of your experience, but of course YFU and your host family will be there to help you out in case you need it. The key to a successful exchange year is not to ask yourself, ‘How do I get what I think I need to make me happy?’, but rather, ‘How can I contribute to the situations that I am part of in a way that makes me and the people around me feel good?’

“Luckily I found a host family early on, and at the beginning of August I will fly to Medina in Ohio (USA)! The day that I will get on a plane is getting closer and closer, but when I look back I realize that my exchange year has started long time ago. I distinctly remember when I sent my application and I had my interview. I made cries of joy and jumped around when a letter with the yellow-gray-orange header was in our mailbox. Also the orientation weekend with YFU will be unforgettable, not only because I got to know a lot of new people, but also because they prepared me very well and I can now throw myself in this adventure with greater confidence. Now I hope that everything is perfect: I have filled out all the files and done everything necessary so nothing stands in the way with my exchange year!” --**Rahel from Switzerland (exchange to USA)**



Your host country will be different! Be prepared to enter a **WHOLE NEW WORLD!**

You should not look at things as better or worse. Take the opportunity to look at your host country culture from an outside perspective. Being immersed in a new culture can give you a unique opportunity to learn new ways of thinking and points of view. It is normal to make assumptions or pass judgment, but try instead to take a balanced view. Sometimes, at the end of your exchange, you might have the feeling that the host country has become your home.

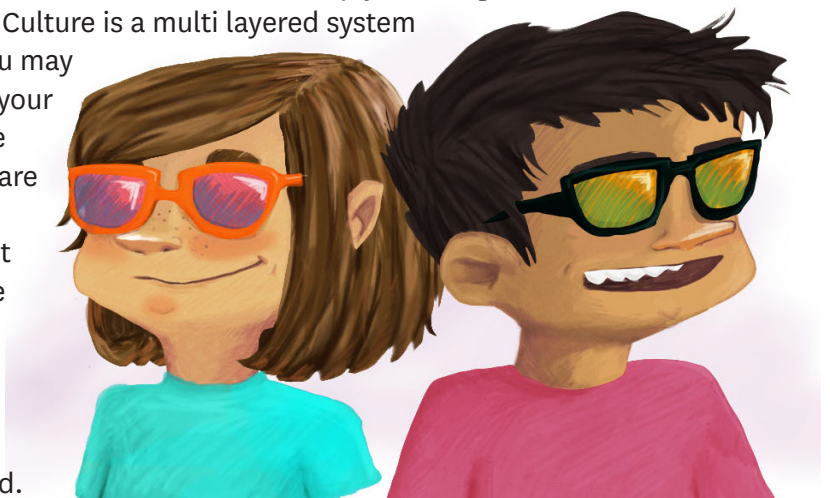
*“I liked the idea of going abroad to experience a new culture, a new place, new people, a new language and the fact that it would help me explore myself. The reason I chose to go on exchange to Switzerland was that it was completely new to me and generally to Indian culture. So, I took the path that was not yet trodden. For me it was completely a new experience even though I studied in a boarding school and had no problems in being punctual and adjusting in a new environment, which is something that the West stands for (punctuality and adaptability). But I was not familiar with Western ideology.” --**Ajay from India (exchange to Switzerland)***

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

Culture: the values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that a group of people hold in common. It is what people create, share together, and carry out. Many of your attitudes, values, assumptions, and beliefs are the same as your family, your community, and the people who live in your country. You learned to think the way you do because you were taught to do so. This does not mean all people in your country have the same opinion, or share the same core values.

Most of us are not aware we have a culture until we step out of it. You will ‘step out’ of your culture when you go to a new country, and step into a new set of values. This does not mean in any way that you will lose your own. Knowing a culture does not mean simply knowing a list of values and beliefs that groups of people share. Culture is a multi layered system created by both differences and similarities. You may feel that people make assumptions about you, your country or your culture, and you may also make these assumptions. This is natural, as all of us are complex and have many layers of identity. Like an ‘onion’ people have a lot of different layers. It means we have to work hard to overcome these reactions, observe and learn.

There are many more ways to think about culture – many more than can be covered here, but keep the following information in mind.



We see the world or other cultures through “colored glasses”. Colored glasses represent the cultural filters through which we observe and interpret what is around us. Our own culture affects the way we see the world – whether we are doing it consciously or not. The things we consider natural in our culture create the lenses of the colored glasses. Even if we do not like it, we use these lenses to view everything in the world - abroad and at home. And so do the people you will meet in your host country.

The layers that make up our colored glasses are many, but they are mainly composed of three elements:



Universal – certain fundamental beliefs that all humans share and that rarely change in different cultures.



Cultural – formed within your home and natural culture: what your parents taught you, what you learned at school and values that you share with your friends.



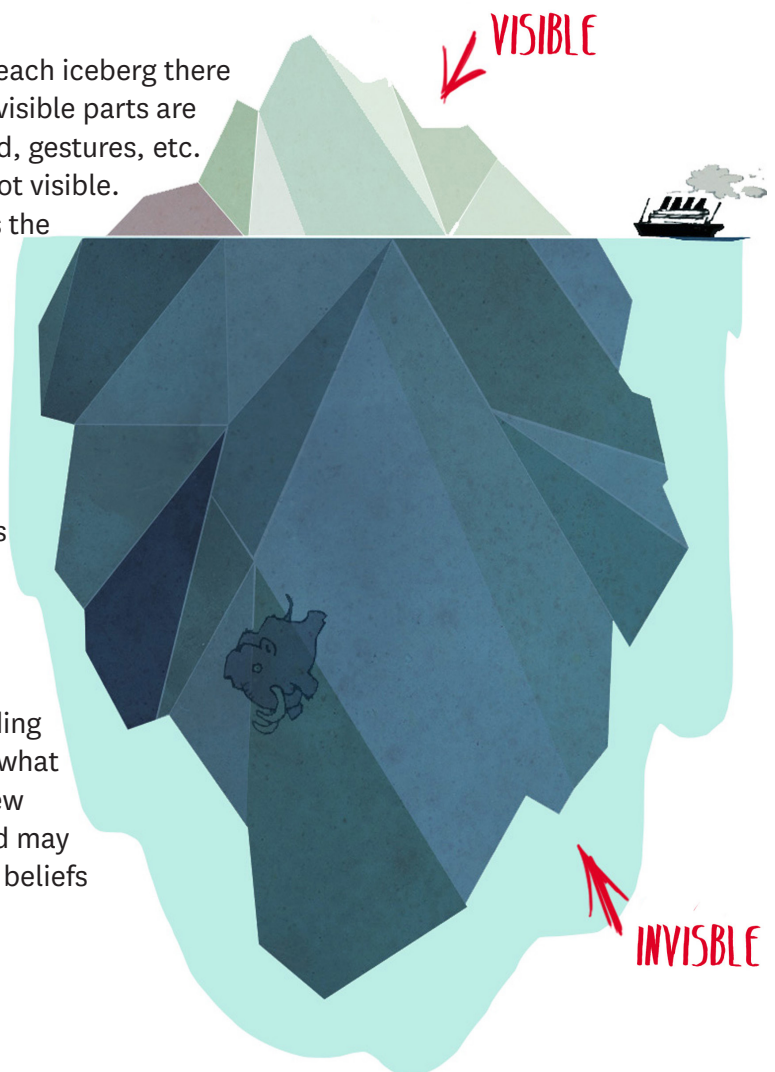
Individual – personal perceptions of the world around you, unique to each person.

Only a small portion of culture is visible.

Culture can be compared to an iceberg. With each iceberg there is a part that is visible – above the water. The visible parts are things like clothes, language, personal space, food, gestures, etc. A much larger portion of it is below the surface, not visible. Culture is similar; what lies beneath the surface is the biggest part and can contain hidden information about people's values, norms, and beliefs of which you as an exchange student are not aware.

Other qualities, such as the way authority is viewed or exercised on equality, rules of etiquette, religious beliefs, time management, concepts of beauty, and general attitudes towards personal freedom, gender, and family values may not be “visible” or obvious at first.

Examining the links between the surface and the deeper aspects of culture is critical to understanding it. Most of the time, the hidden part determines what the visible parts will look like. As you learn the new culture, consider that what you do not understand may be determined by some of these hidden values or beliefs and how they affect people's ways of conduct.



PREPARING FOR CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

When you are in another culture, you could find yourself reacting in some of these ways which could prevent you from learning the new culture:

Thinking “my culture is the best” (ethnocentrism)
This attitude can lead you to judge the host culture in terms of good or bad. Ideas, values and customs should not be considered good or bad; just different from your own. The opposite can happen too. Your host family and friends might think your behavior is based on values and beliefs that are bad or incorrect. Meanwhile you see your values as not only good but correct.

Remember you are not going on an exchange to judge what is bad or what is good. You are on an exchange program to understand the different aspects of another country – and to learn diverse ways of thinking, living, working, and studying. You will learn how cultures are different from one another.

Expecting that everybody will see the world as I do (naïve realism)

The environment in which you were born and raised shapes your view of the world and relationships. Someone who grew up in a different environment, like your new friends and host family, may have a different perspective of things.

These different perceptions can influence the communication between you and your host family and friends, or generally with any person in the host country. It is especially true for things such as hand gestures, slang, and the use of informal or formal language that can



vary greatly and can be perceived very differently.

“In Ghana, my host country, it is forbidden or at least impolite to do anything with the left hand (like shaking hands, waving, collect something from someone, give something to someone, eat) and I didn’t know that. As a lefty, I learnt it the first time when I asked my friend sitting next to me at school to borrow her ruler. When she gave it to me, I collected it with the right hand but when I gave it back I did it with my left hand and she hit the back of my hand with the ruler! Then she explained why. But still, during my exchange year, I made several times this mistake again: my teacher did not want to give me a sheet because I wanted to take it with the left hand. And eating with only one hand is not easy so sometimes I cheated and used both of my hands.” --Frank from France (exchange to Ghana)

Thinking that everybody is the same and reducing everything to something simpler (stereotyping)

When you have an overly simple attitude of much more complex things and people, it means you are generalizing. At the beginning of your exchange you may think this attitude can help you to understand difficult and different beliefs. This attitude can be dangerous, especially if the stereotype is negative. It can also offend people if you draw conclusions that hurt their feelings.



Instead of stereotyping people and concepts, find the differences and accept them as they are. Let your new host family and friends define themselves!

Once you start meeting new people and making friends, as well as learning more about the uniqueness of each individual, you will not need to generalize anymore, and you will find that not only are cultures diverse, so are people.



“During my exchange year in Texas (USA) many times I heard strange or stereotypical comments on my natural country, Belgium. As I ignored so many aspects of Texas so my host family ignored all the details of life in Belgium. Even before we met, some of their requests seemed really strange to me. My host family asked if I was able to find a telephone or if I had one in my house. They assumed that neither my family nor my friends had a phone in the house! This misconception of how technologically advanced my country was continued even when I arrived in my host family house. Several times my host family asked me if I knew what a frozen meal was, or if in Belgium I was able to find freeze-dried food. One day, my host family invited me to go with them to a typical American supermarket. They thought I never had the chance to see a big shopping mall in my life... I disappointed them since even though huge supermarkets are not that common in Belgium, we still have quite few of them.” --Siska from Belgium (exchange to USA)

PREPARING FOR DIFFERENT HABITS AND COMMUNICATION STYLES

You will find very quickly that you have different habits from your host family. Just like you are used to doing certain things in certain ways, your host family and friends will have typical habits too.



Always assume that the customs of your home country are not the same as your host country.



Be cautious and observant at first. Learning new customs is one of the key ways to better feel at home.

“During my exchange year in Japan one of my favorite teacher was hospitalized. My friends and I decided to visit her a couple of times in the hospital. I was quite happy when she was finally okay and be able come back to school, but unprepared to receive from my teacher a gift coupon for a restaurant. This gift was not only for me but also for my 4 friends who came with me to the hospital. I felt a little bit confused, as something I had done because I genuinely care for my teacher was evaluated monetarily. I tried to refuse the gift several time. But I saw that my teacher felt more and more uncomfortable with my attitude. Later on my Japanese friends told me that I should had accepted the gift since this was the Japanese way to show gratitude. As I found later the custom of giving gift it is an extremely important things in Japan.” --Alice from USA (exchange to Japan)

Mind-set/Mentality

The mind set of your new friends and family (i.e., the way they interpret and respond to situations), can be very different from yours. If you find you are unable to understand different mentalities, remember to collect your thoughts before you say something, as you do not want to offend anyone. You should also be aware that some cultures, depending on the situation, apply the same rules to everyone, while others consider different things. Cultures with an objective mind-set believe that “rules are rules” and these rules apply to everyone in each situation. Cultures that are more subjective take into consideration different things. Still other cultures are much more concerned with applying a rule based on a situation: not every situation deserves the same judgment and consideration.

Perception of time

Some cultures are very time-oriented with strict schedules and penalties for those who are late or move too slowly. Other cultures place less emphasis on time and they do not schedule the entire day. These cultures sometimes prefer to plan their days around social interaction or relationships.

TIPS If you are used to being on time everywhere, be prepared: for people to be late, for your friends to engage you in long conversations, or to wait a long time in lines for service.

On the other hand, if you are used to placing a low priority on schedules, be prepared for more formal approaches to time – such as making appointments, getting to class early, or feeling rushed to make decisions in a store or in a restaurant.



“Since I started the school in Germany I was amazed how the kids in my school could stay focused for so long. We always are working and studying nonstop for an hour and a half class, because in my school the classes are arranged in an hour and a half. Moreover, in Germany all students are really diligent when it comes to follow the time for recess. In Uruguay, I remember I did not consider the bell and we all spent another 5 minutes outside; we did not care if we were late. Instead here in Germany even before the bell rings we are already back in the class, sometimes even 1 or 2 minutes before the break time is over.” --**José from Uruguay (exchange to Germany)**

Individualist vs. Collectivist - Focus on individual vs. focus on group/society

You will find that different cultures prioritize values, beliefs and customs differently. Some cultures may emphasize individual achievement. Other cultures instead may promote acting on behalf of the good of the group. If you are in a culture that prioritizes belonging to a group, you may need to participate in more events and activities. If, on the other hand, you are in a culture that emphasizes individual achievements, you may be asked to perform well in school.

“Coming from South Africa, and having never been outside the country EVER, where every definition of a South African revolves around the concept of ‘Ubuntu’ – Motho ke motho ka batho (humanity towards others). Then arriving in Sweden, where politely greeting everyone on the bus or T-bana (metro) as you enter it is reciprocated by the assumption that you are on recreational medicine. In general, in South Africa I address every older lady as ‘Mam’ based on the culture that a whole community brings up a child. As an exchange student, I had never visited my closest neighbours or even personally knew them. Everyone in Sweden seemed to be about their own business.

But even so, this was not an absolute attribute, often I felt once the Swedes got to know you they were often more ‘Ubuntu’ and this is where I think the difference comes. The general culture of my home country was ‘collectivist’, but I think every nation has a bit of collectivism; the difference is how deep it runs. A silly, but good example is how it is easy in South Africa to ask someone for some chewing gum at school when you hardly know the individual. But in Sweden, this would be considered very very impolite, to put it lightly. You once again realise how true the statement is that ‘it’s not right, it’s not wrong, it’s just different’. Different IS good.”
--**Ngoako from South Africa (exchange in Sweden)**

Communication styles – verbal communication

Some cultures might use a very direct communication style. Your host family and friends may say exactly how they feel, what they think or want. They may not be afraid to speak their mind. In some cultures it is appropriate to give a direct answer to any question. Other cultures may use a more subtle communication style. They may rely on the use of body language such as gestures, eye contact and body posture. In these cases, answering too directly can be considered rude. It is also very important to understand silence. Some will view silence as a good and expected thing. Others may be made uncomfortable by long silences. Observe how your host family interacts and if you do not understand how to communicate, ask them.

“My exchange year was in Sweden in 2005-2006 but it was in 2008 that I realized how the nonverbal communication was different between Sweden and the country where I come from, France. I went back to my host country several times after my exchange year such as in 2008 where I spent three months for an internship as an ending for my studies in France and I decided, and had the opportunity, to do it up there, in the North. One day, there was a big party for the 50th anniversary of the University I was working in and a lot of Swedish as well as foreign people were there. The husband of one of my colleagues was from Belgium and was able to speak French. So we switched language, from Swedish to French, for a while but we were interrupted by my colleagues who were laughing at us. When we asked them what was so funny, here was their answer: ‘Well, in Sweden, we talk with our two hands in our pockets, in Belgium, it seems like they are talking with one hand in their pocket and the other one doing nonverbal talking meanwhile in France, they are doing nonverbal talking with both of their hands!’ And after that, I tried to pay attention on how I was talking and I realized that when I was speaking French, I was using my hands a lot but when I was speaking Swedish, I almost didn’t use them! That really shows the impact of a specific language and its culture on the non verbal communication.” --Amandine from France (exchange to Sweden)

Personal space and eye contact

Like language, communication through body gestures and eye contact can be very personal. In some cultures people feel it is inappropriate to stand too close or to make eye contact with strangers or people of different ages. Others are very comfortable with close personal contact or think that making eye contact in any situation is a correct and acceptable way to engage people in conversation. The best way to learn what is appropriate in your new culture is to observe those around you, especially your host family and friends.



Ask your host family or the area representative what they consider correct behavior. It is important to know what you should do. Make an effort to be comfortable around people and learn what is inappropriate or unacceptable.

“One of the things that really made me tense during my exchange was personal space. In my opinion, in my host country, France, you stand very close to each other when you talk. Of course this feels completely natural to my French host family and friends. Instead, I felt as if I was seeing double when trying to look them in the eye. So, without realizing it, I backed off a bit each time I was having a conversation with someone. One day, out of the blue, my friend asked me if she smelled bad. I looked at her, confused ‘No, why, do I?’ She told me how she had noticed that I always seemed back off when she was coming too close. So she had figured I must have thought she smelled bad. From that day on I always tried to stand still when talking to someone. And to always complement their perfume choices.” --Agnes from Sweden (exchange to France)

Since you are not used to some of these new ways of communication, you will certainly make some mistakes. Here are some tips to better embrace different styles of communication:



Observe others and imitate their behavior.



Just ask!! Ask anyone if they feel comfortable with the way you are behaving.



Do not let uncertainty about communication or mistakes discourage you - this is a chance to learn!



Try to find out why certain behaviors are not considered acceptable. This will give you more insight into the country’s culture. It can help you avoid mistakes in the future.

“During a conversational class run by a volunteering association a Russian friends and I were having a chat with a Japanese volunteer, that was there to correct our grammar mistakes and intonation. My friend and I were quite direct and often we were mocking each other, calling each other by our nicknames, asking personal questions about feelings and love interests and in general being sarcastic towards each other. We talked as we were used to do when we were alone. But our teacher interrupt us explaining that it was rude to talk about this topics so openly in front of a stranger. She explain that in Japan the communication style is often very indirect even between friends and never accepted if another person were included in the conversation. I learned that was okay to ask about how much someone earns at work but not about their feelings and being sarcastic. Even answering a question with a direct ‘no’ or ‘yes’ it is considered rude. I felt like I was really disrespectful but thanks to this lesson I learned that my usual direct style of communication was different and not really effective if I was talking with Japanese people. But I was also glad I learned how native speakers interact to each other.” -- Angeline from France (exchange to Japan)

DOING YOUR HOMEWORK BEFORE YOU GO

Do your homework. It is good to prepare yourself for learning about your host country. This does not mean you need to write an essay or report. There are lots of different and fun ways to get to know your host country!

“When I found Estonia on the list of potential destination countries and wanted to learn more about it, I first went to the Wikipedia site in order to gain a general overview. In addition I wanted to know more about the language, I kept searching on this site when suddenly my own name caught my attention, because Maja in Estonian means house and was quoted here as an example of the language. I thought it was funny, because at the time I did not know that I would actually end up in Estonia. I was thrilled that I decided for it, regardless of the complicated language. So I went there, and everything was great.” --Maja from Germany (exchange to Estonia)

Know your own country. Look up your country on the internet or look through a book or two to strengthen your basic knowledge of the history, political system and people of your home country. You will be surprised about how many things you did not know!

You can also better understand the past and present of your country through classic and contemporary movies - or through quick internet searches such as Wikipedia, Google, blogs, etc.



Read some newspapers, watch or listen to the news so you will be more informed about current events in your home country.

RESEARCH CAN BE A GOOD TOOL.....

Research will help you because:



People you meet in your host country may not know very much about your home country and part of your exchange is sharing your country with them.



If you inform yourself about your own country before you leave, it will help you to understand differences that you encounter in your host country.



Your host family and friends will be curious about your experience and help you counter assumptions that your new friends may have towards your country and culture.

Learn more about your host country. Even if you have just a little knowledge of your host country and no personal experience of it, learning ahead of your exchange will give you a better impression of what your host country will look like.



Do some internet research or look through some books about your host country to learn about its history, political system, people and specific customs and traditions.



Try to learn as much as you can about the history of your host country. Every culture has developed in a certain way because of its history. Understanding history is often crucial for understanding culture.

You can try to find some interesting articles, blogs or movies to gain a better understanding of your host country. These days it is easy to find movies with subtitles on the internet to help you hear and begin learning the language. This research will help give you a background for everything you might encounter.



WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR HOST FAMILY

Living in a host family can give you an amazing learning experience like no other: the opportunity to gain direct knowledge of family life in another culture! Living every day with your host family immerses you in another culture.

IT'S A FAMILY BUT A DIFFERENT FAMILY!

Your host family might be:



Different from your natural family.



Nothing like what you were expecting. This is not only because of the structure of the family, but also where they live.



The composition of family members can vary greatly: a single mother or father, a married couple with no children, a couple divorced and then remarried, a homosexual couple, a family with adopted children, grandparents living in the house, etc.



The house itself could be very different from what you are used to. It could be an apartment, a villa, a farm or anything in between– it could be small, medium or large.

“When I first came to Ecuador, I was surprised how much my host parents worked. They did not come home till six p.m. or sometimes even eight p.m. I found to be alone all day very boring. My host siblings were all abroad when I arrived in Ecuador, so in my first month I was alone and unhappy. Besides, my school would not start for two weeks after my arrival. When my host siblings came back home, I was so happy. Unfortunately, they were also busy with university classes and assignments. They were sometimes busy until six or even ten in the night! I thought about changing family, but then I realized something. I just need to do something else! To be busy as well! So I started new hobbies and meeting up with friends whenever possible. Problem solved! My dad in Norway always told me ‘it is not about what you get, but about how you handle it.’ There is ALWAYS a solution, and sometimes it is just your attitude and ways of thinking that stand in between.” --Aurora from Norway (exchange to Ecuador)

Responsibilities

What will your responsibilities be in the host family? This will vary from family to family, but you should expect to take part in the day-to-day activities of the family and to follow the rules of their household. The most basic and important thing is to RESPECT your host family.

What your host family expects:

- Help around the house, and simple chores like cooking and cleaning. Keep your room or personal space tidy, make your bed, do not let your room look like something exploded in it, etc.
- Following the rules of your host parents is really important! Remember that these rules can be quite different from the ones you are used to in your own home.
- Finally, always show your appreciation; do not forget to say thank you!



It is important not to see rules as borders that limit your personal space but as guidelines that will help you stay on the right path. Often these rules will be more strict at the beginning. Once you have gained your host family's trust, they will know what to expect from you.

Your role as a new family member

You are going to have a second family and you will be considered a family member. Treat their home as carefully as your own home. Be engaged; get to know each member of the family, share family experiences with them, play with the children or just spend some times with them - share your life! You can tell them about your life in your natural country and what your experience in the host country is like. This will give them a better understanding of how you feel and if you are having fun in the host country. They can also try to help any problems you might face. They want to make sure you are having a wonderful experience!

To feel more at home in your host family's house, make note of their household routine. Observe the schedule, the relationship between the parents and children or other relatives, and the level of privacy and personal space.

Try your best to fit in and be positive! If you find that you are consistently frustrated about some aspects of living together, it will be important to learn how to constructively communicate about these issues in order to arrive at a common understanding. Solving problems together builds trust, strengthens relationships and provides everyone with invaluable opportunities to learn from one another.

“Understanding”, a term that YFU has written into its name, is not just a word. It is a process of working together with the host family to solve problems.

“During my exchange in the USA I decided that I needed to change my host family. Generally the life with them was fine, but you always know when you are part of a family and when you are not. Tiny but consistent different behaviors and conversations made me decide that I wanted to experience something completely different. I wanted a host family where I could build a close relationship. So with the help of YFU USA I found a new accommodation. My new family was really busy, my host parents worked full time and they were taking care of their son, who was in the hospital for treatments. However, even though they were so busy they found the time to share interests and time with me. I tried to help them in any way I could: doing my chores, taking care of the house and being diligent at school. One day, my second host family took an entire day to drive me miles away to my school competition. My host parents not only drove me there but they cheered and supported me all the time. I felt as they were my family, this day became really special to me.” --Siska from Belgium (exchange to USA)

STARTING A NEW EXPERIENCE WITH YFU

When you first arrive in your host country you may be excited, hopeful, confused, worried, or all of these at the same time! The beginning will always be hard. Just remember things you see or hear that are different from what you are used to. Try not to make yourself feel you need to know everything and do things in the correct way. Make an effort not to feel the pressure if you aren't comfortable at first.



It is easy to feel discouraged when you are expecting to start out on a fabulous journey, but find that you are instead uncomfortable and unhappy. But do not panic. You are experiencing a phase of a cycle of adjustment called “culture shock”. Within a short period of time, initial disappointments and shocks almost always give way to exciting discoveries and positive experiences.

Finding ways to step into a new culture – while having the opportunity to get together with other international students – will give you a more interesting study abroad experience.

This guide, and the people of YFU will help you understand these differences and learn more about what it is like to live in your new “home away from home”.

To help guide you through anything you might face during your exchange, check out the tips and advice that you will find on the pages that follow.

*“Your view of everything is going to change even without realizing it by acquiring so much knowledge! For this you just need to do one thing and without it, you just cannot. It is something which will make everything easy: you just need to ACCEPT. That is it. It is not much to do but when I understood this I think I understood everything that is in an exchange year, and it is actually not only for India but for any exchange year. Myself, I needed nearly 6 months to understand this and I really wasted a lot of time on this. But afterward everything was just amazing and I enjoyed every moments of my time there.” --**Laetitia from France (exchange to India)***

LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE

Facing a different language can be one of the most difficult changes to adjust to, but it is also one of the most valuable. Learning a new language is a process and there are ways you can plan to deal with that process. It is important to motivate yourself while learning. Language is not the only key to adjusting to a new culture; it can be a tool to help you to feel “at home”. If you understand the people around you, you will feel more confident and ready to start a new day in your host country.



Make an effort to speak the language! Even if you are not confident in your speaking abilities, most people will appreciate the effort and will respect you for trying. Practice makes perfect!



Be prepared to have difficulties even if you are confident in your speaking abilities. The use of slang can make understanding difficult.



Accents can be hard to understand. Do not feel badly or worry if you need to ask people to repeat themselves.



Expect difficulties understanding those who speak quickly. You need to be exposed to the language for a while before you can understand fast speech.

A way to avoid misunderstanding

Be aware of formal and informal language styles as some countries have more than one way of speaking. Usage and rules may vary among families. It is usually a good idea when speaking with anyone older than you to begin with formal language and then they may give you permission to use informal language.



“Meeting with other exchange students was really funny. But I could speak Swedish with only a few other students. I do not know why, but it seems that the most of them have more difficulties to learn this new language. Or maybe it is just me. I am maybe a much faster learner. I noticed that even though everybody made a lot of progress in speaking the language we are on different levels. I do not think that this depends only on how much you are immersed in the culture and familiar with your host family, but I think it also depend on your personal skills. I hope for all my new friends to find a way to enjoy the language and tricks to learn the grammar and terms faster. And by the time we will meet again, we will speak together Swedish! Anyway, when we had problem of communication we were speaking English. It is always nice and good to speak English with them!! I feel that since I came here, also my English has improved as well.”

--Enea from Switzerland (exchange to Sweden)

It is okay if you cannot say very much at first. Explain to people that you are still learning, and listen to everyone around you. Keep in mind that you are there to learn or improve your language skills. No one expects you to be fluent in the new language immediately. Try again. Do not let mistakes discourage you! Do not feel embarrassed by your mistakes; it is just a little bump in the road to learning.



Watch TV or listen to the radio with your friends or host family. Ask them to explain things you do not understand. Advertisements and kids’ programs are especially good, since the simple language will help you become familiar with common words, phrases and expressions.



If possible in your host country, GO TO THE LIBRARY! In the local public libraries you can find books that are easier for you to read. Remember that if someone corrects you, they are just trying to help you improve. Sometimes they will correct you even if they understand you because they want you to make progress!



Ask your host family or people with whom you are familiar to correct you. You will feel more confident to speak with someone you know, and they will be more open to correcting you.

Everyone learns a new language at a different pace. Do not be discouraged if you feel that you are not a fast learner. There are plenty of tricks you can learn to help speak the language. Ask your host family or your teachers to help you out.



If you are having difficulties or simply want to improve your skills even more, find someone – perhaps host family members or a friend - to be your language buddy. A language buddy is a person with whom you can practice your language skills. He or she can be a native speaker or someone who has already mastered the language you are learning. Having a language buddy will not only help you build your language skills, it will build a new relationship too!!

“In my exchange year in the US, I was studying in a Christian private school. I really liked being at this school, it just took some getting used to because everything was a lot more conservative than in my home country. In late September, I was invited to the homecoming dance by this really nice, but very Christian guy. We exchanged a few texts about how to get to the homecoming party and what to do before and after, when suddenly he texted me that he had just bought my homecoming corsage! You should have seen my face; I was just staring at this text, open-mouthed. Was this super Christian, conservative guy REALLY telling me he bought a corsage for me? It took me some time to figure out that in America, the word corsage has not the same meaning as in my home country. In Austria a corsage is the same thing of a corset. You can imagine how relieved I was when I found out that he had not bought underwear, but just a nice flower wrist bouquet for me.” --**Alexandra from Austria (exchange to USA)**



GETTING ALONG WITH YOUR HOST FAMILY

Living with a host family is a great learning experience. You are going to have a second family that will help, protect and love you! The family you are going to live with can be very different from your natural family. The relationship between family members may be different from what you are used to. Not only will they have another way of doing things, but their way of thinking and customs can be unlike yours.

“As far as my host family is concerned, I must say that it is hard to expect a better one! It is true that it is not a ‘typical’ family, but that really should not prevent you from taking part in this experience! There is too much you can earn from it to waste this opportunity, especially for so little details as the number of your family members, their origin, their preferences, etc. My host father - who composes my entire family with another exchange student - is someone completely devoted to YFU, and I know that together, we will be living an unforgettable year!” --Thomas from Belgium (exchange to USA)

You will be completely immersed in new family rituals, going through the process of adapting. You will encounter different ideas, perspectives and a completely new family dynamic.

- Interact with family members the way they interact with each other.
- Remember to be polite and respectful at all times with your host family. Over time you will gain their trust and you will feel more confident to be around them.
- Communicate with your host parents. You should try to build a positive relationship with them. It will help to overcome potential conflicts in the future.
- Try to develop a good relationship with your host siblings. This may be uncomfortable or difficult at first, but over time it should get easier and will help you to feel more at home.

*“My host family was a Navy family. My host father was an officer in the U.S. Navy. About half way into my exchange year he was promoted to a higher rank. As was customary in such circumstances a ceremony and party were organized on a nearby naval base. After the ceremony, where my host father received his new rank insignia, all of us in the family stood up in line, first my host father, then my host mother and finally my host brother, my host sisters and I. Then all the other naval officers present, including some admirals, stood in line to shake our hands and express their congratulations. They not only congratulated and shook hands with the entire family, but they also included me naturally as a member of the family. Some of them even jokingly asked me if my pocket-money would be raised now as a consequence of my Dad’s promotion. All of this really made me feel as if I was part of the family and not just an exchange student anymore.” --**Marcus from Germany (exchange to USA)***



If you notice that your host family is upset with you about something, even if you feel there is no reason, it can be very sensible and helpful to say that you are sorry anyway. In an intercultural context, you often cannot possibly know the full extent of effects and impressions that your actions are having. Apologizing is not an admission of guilt, but rather a clear gesture of good will and humility that will almost always reduce tensions and enable trustful communication.

Over time, you will become a new member of a new family. They have invited you to be a part of their home and daily lives. It is very important that you both learn to trust each other and respect each other’s values and beliefs.

Sometimes you might face a situation where you and your host siblings of the same age have huge expectations for each other, like you both think you are going to be best friends. It is important for each of you to understand you do not need to become best friends but you do need to become siblings, which is something completely different. Sometimes it is hard for siblings close in age to see their place in the family being occupied by someone else and sibling rivalry can start without anyone realizing it.

*“I had a great experience with YFU, both as an exchange student and as a host sibling to an exchange student. It was amazing to be able to have the opportunity to live in Spain and experience a completely new lifestyle when I was 17. In addition, later on my family hosted a student from Argentina. Since I am an only child it was great to have the opportunity to have a ‘sister’. To this day, Vivi – my host sister - and I remain really close and I still consider her my sister! I am thankful to YFU for giving me the possibility to understand and appreciate the beauty of different cultures!” --**Johanna from Germany (exchange to Spain)***



It is possible that you may get lots of attention from your host parents or other family members. This may cause some tensions with your host siblings. They might feel jealous or threatened by your presence.

Try to do your best to make your host sibling feel special too. Try to spend some time with them, invite them to hang out with you, etc. BUT remember: you may have to give them some private time!

Since you are coming from a different culture, you might not like or understand everything about your host family. It is natural to experience some conflict during your home stay, and typically this problem will come from small matters.



Try to focus on the positive.



Become familiar with the ways your cultures differ. This process will require time and patience. You just need to take a moment, reflect on what happened and in a second time ask for clarification on culture differences.



Make an effort. Sometimes it is necessary to reflect on why specific issues bother or confuse you. Is it because you are not used to them? Or is it because they conflict with your beliefs?



Understand there is a chance that some of your behavior might bother or confuse your host family as well.



COMMUNICATE!! The best way to get through any kind of misunderstanding is to communicate with your host family.

*“First days, they are shy, unassuming, looking for landmarks ... But very fast, they settle at home, being part of the family, used to being there. Conversations become easier and relaxed. It became a sequence of little happiness: to welcome them in the kitchen after school, to cook with them, to do dictation of recipes and bursting into laughter about a mistranslation or a misinterpretation. We ask things, we share things, we explain a lot and time runs so fast. There are all wonderful ‘first times’: first waffle, first fries ate, walking on the street, first yellowing tree, first walk on fallen dead leaves, first snow, first flower in spring...
Of course, to welcome strangers at home (‘stranger’ in every way: strangers to the family, strangers to the country), it is a little bit complicated. We must recreate our living space, Change some habits, take time to explain, listen, console when homesickness is too heavy, but it is such a pleasure to pass our culture down, to compare ideas... I never gave more than I received. And I still receive from beyond the oceans. On Mothers’ day, I receive messages from all continents, from children hosted 3 month, 1 year or a few days.” --Alix, host mother from Belgium*

Dealing with new family rules

Living with a new family comes with new customs and rules. Every family has rules and traditions, some of which may be different from your own. The rules can be different for different reasons. First of all, rules for teenagers are often culturally different. Second, your host family is responsible for your well-being during your stay, so they might feel that they need to be protective. Finally, you are not a house guest, but a member of your new family. So instead of be offended by the rules, remember that your host family is treating you like a member of their family, teaching you about being a teenager in their culture or showing you how much they care for you. After all, they want to make you feel at home!

COMMUNICATION!!!

It is extremely important to communicate with your host family as much as possible. Your host parents are responsible for your safety and they are committed to giving you the best experience. Do not be afraid to ask them for help!

- If you are struggling with something, they can help you
- Communicating can help prevent misunderstandings
- Communicating is a great way for you and your host family to learn from each other.

If they correct your behavior, do not take it personally.

You may think you are mature enough to decide what is best for you. However, no matter how capable you are in your own home, you do not have all the information you need to make the best judgment when you are living in another culture.

Host Family and Social Media

Connecting with your host siblings on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter is a great way to share your experience. Be cautious, as there are some common mistakes all of us can make when we express our feelings or react quickly. Although it is a good thing to express your feelings, it is important to respect your host family.



Remember that your host family might be able to read whatever you post or tweet online. If you have negative feelings you should first talk to your host family in person, instead of posting something. Even if you post in another language your host family can understand thanks to online translators.

If you have not communicated your problem in person with your host family, they may read your comment online. This could hurt their feelings and might compromise the outcome of your stay with them.

If your natural family sees only bad comments and does not have full information, they could get worried.

Use common sense: do not post inappropriate comments. Instead, use your best judgment and consider others' feelings.



Changing host families

It is normal, and quite possible, that problems arise when people live together who have never seen each other and are supposed to be a family. Sometimes, these problems can only be solved by changing host families. Nobody, neither you nor your host family, should be forced to suffer. You have not failed if you do not get along with your host family.

On the other hand, you should take the time to get to know one another, and have patience with one another to get over the problems that come up in the very beginning.

A change of host families is, principally, not a solution to problems; it is rather an emergency exit out of an uncomfortable situation. If you do not take the time to let YFU help you recognize the reasons for this situation, similar problems are likely to occur with the new host family as well.

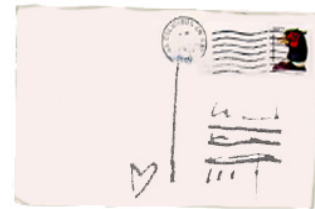
An exchange year is a challenge, and an opportunity to discover one's own limits. You should not give up too easily, but prove to yourself that you are ready to face the challenge. On the other hand, you should not suffer, or be pushed beyond your limits. Contact your local YFU representative for support and do not hesitate to share your concerns. If a change of host families is necessary, YFU will take the steps to find a new host family for you. It is important that you do not act without the approval of the YFU office in your host country!

In case you are facing a change of host families, please be patient. The screening of host families and the placement process can be time consuming and require thorough documentation. YFU is responsible for your well-being and we will do our best to support you in difficult situations.

STAYING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

During your exchange your natural parents will likely want to know how you are doing. You may or may not want to share every little detail with your parents. An important point to remember is that your communication with your natural family (or, for that matter, with friends in your home country or with other exchange students) should not be the way you choose to solve problems during your exchange. Learning to clarify things directly with your host family and the people who are part of your hosting environment is an essential part of having a fulfilling and successful exchange experience.

Modern telecommunication makes it very easy to choose a ‘path of least resistance’ when it comes to facing challenging situations, because you can immediately contact people with whom you already trust. But they cannot effectively change your situation. They are far away and usually unaware of the full situation. Ultimately, if you have concerns about your host family and/or hosting environment, you should seek ways to clarify those concerns with the people who are directly involved.



Try to stick to a schedule at least at the beginning of your stay. Having a written plan of when you want to make Skype calls or write an e-mail home is a great way to keep your family and friends informed, without losing special moments in your host country. If you spend too much time online, you will easily ignore your new life in the host country. The schedule does not need to be strict and does not have to be exactly the same throughout your entire exchange.

If you feel that your parents call or e-mail you too frequently, it is okay to respectfully tell them you want to focus on your life in your host country. On the other hand, you should not stop all contact with them, and if you are not comfortable telling that to your parents, ask your host family or YFU for advice.

Another way to keep up-to-date with your natural parents is to keep a blog, u Facebook page or post on Twitter. Social media can be a great way to share w of people at once, instead of having to write individual e-mail. But remember these sites in an appropriate manner, avoiding offensive comments. Updating Facebook or Twitter page, sharing photos of your new friends and host family, phrases you have learned, writing about food or recipes you love, or uploadin town is a good way to share your experience.



“Try not to use the internet or social networking sites often because that was a big mistake that I made. I used Twitter, Skype and Facebook all the time to communicate with my family and I saw that they were having fun and doing things without me, which made me feel even more homesick than I was. I think that if I never used Facebook while I was there, I would have enjoyed my time better.” --Christina from USA (exchange to Japan)

It is completely normal to have a bad day or miss home once in a while.

Here are some tips to get over these feelings:



Do something you would do when you are having a bad day at home, like listening to music, taking a nap, exercising etc. This might help you to feel better.



Think about what you are enjoying about your host country.



Participate in something new with your host family or with friends at school. They might introduce you to an activity that you will deeply enjoy.



You might realize that you are used to so many things that you take for granted in your home country. Sometimes you need the different experience to understand how much of your own culture is within you.



It is fine to express your feelings on your blog or on your Facebook or Twitter page. Even though it is fine to post that you miss your home, negative comments about your host country or family may make your parents worry and this attitude can hurt your relationship with your host family.

Keep in mind that too many phone calls with your natural parents or spending too much time on your blog, Facebook page or Twitter can have the opposite effect and make you feel unhappy, especially at the beginning of your stay. You can easily trigger feelings of homesickness or sadness.

“I am currently studying abroad in Japan again through my university, and I have found that it is very easy when you are frustrated with the language or culture shock to retreat into the internet, where you can talk with friends from home and understand everything. But why go to another country and spend the whole time doing something you could have done at home?” --
Garrett from USA (exchange to Japan)

INTERNET GUIDELINES



Internet and social media sites. Facebook and Twitter are some of the most important and popular ways for people to communicate and learn about each other. But it is important to use them appropriately, especially while on your YFU exchange.

While you are on your exchange, it is nice to share your experience with your friends and family. Your posts should contain proper and non-offensive observations. Try to describe your experience without being negative. Engaging your friends through pictures, posts and blogs is a good way to keep in touch with them, as they will be curious to know more about your exchange. For example, you can post about arriving in your host country or to your host family's house, what your school is like, the food you have recently tried, school trips, differences you've observed between your home and host country, describing a "typical day", your favorite place in your host community.

You should not post things that are offensive, inappropriate or rude. In other words, do not post things you would not want your own family to read, or negative or judgmental comments about your host country, family or friends. A bad post can not only offend your host parents. It can also give a bad impression to your natural parents who might think you are not enjoying the exchange.

If you feel tempted to post a negative comment, take a minute or two to think about it!

Are you having a bad day?

You might be experiencing a bad day or you may feel frustrated or just annoyed. This can lead to a bad reaction and poor judgment.

Did you have a misunderstanding with someone?

You may feel annoyed by someone's behavior, but instead of posting it online you should talk directly to the person who made you feel bad. In this way you can solve the problem without hurting your relationships.

Is your negative feeling a stereotype?

It is possible that something unusual or different from your home country has bothered you. You may have experienced difficulties dealing with a particular situation due to a lack of knowledge or familiarity with procedures or rules. Take time to reflect on why this new situation has made you feel bad and try to see the positive aspects, such as what you have learned from it.



Usually, if you stop for a moment to think about your emotions, you may realize that you are reacting negatively because you don't yet know something or have not had time to adjust to a new situation.



Remember that everything you post on the internet is PUBLIC! Your natural family, host family, friends and even teachers might read what you wrote. A bad comment or post may damage your relationships with your host family, school or friends.

At the beginning of your home stay, you may want to set yourself a schedule of when you will update your blog, Twitter or Facebook page. The blog could have many functions: to report on your personal experiences or host culture, or simply to be a tool to cope with your feelings. **TIPS** Keep in mind that regularly updating your blog will take some time and energy. Whether you make daily updates or write only when you feel the urge to do so, it will be up to you. However, it is best to limit your time online because it keeps you from getting involved with people face to face and makes it harder for you to adjust to your new environment.

“Keep in mind you are there not to test the internet but to learn about other cultures, believe me, people won't forget that you exist if you do not go as often on Facebook or Twitter as before. Just take good advantage of your time in your exchange, if not when you are back you might regret it.” --Claudette from Mexico (exchange to France)



You should be aware of local laws concerning online content. Laws and ethics surrounding internet use may vary from country to country and family to family. Appropriate computer use will keep you and your host family safe from unwelcome cyber contacts.

Some countries have very strict laws about downloading music, videos and other online materials. Beware that illegally downloading online materials can hurt your exchange experience and do damage to your host family if any laws are broken. Do not use violent, offensive, or suggestive photos, screen names or language on the internet.

Remember also that you must always respect your host family's rules in these matters. You should ask permission before adding programs, downloading materials from the internet or opening e-mail attachments on their computer. You might even want to ask about what you can download onto your own computer.

Safety - guidelines for a proper use of the internet

To protect yourself, your natural family, and your host family, you should NEVER post personal information, such as your host/natural family's full name, private phone numbers, addresses, e-mail addresses, bank information, school name, home town, personal pictures or any other sensitive information.



You should ask permission from your host parents before posting photos of their family or house anywhere on the internet.

Be cautious using chat rooms. You do not know with whom you are chatting so do not reveal personal information. Never agree to meet someone in person whom you met in an internet chat room. It's best to avoid chat rooms completely.

Never share bank, credit card, e-mail, blog or social media site passwords. Giving away this sensitive information can be dangerous. Keep them to yourself.

Do not accept Facebook friend requests from people you do not know. Beware of the danger of internet predators. They use the internet to find out personal information about you.

Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying can take the form of a message in an e-mail or in an instant message on social networking sites where someone mocks or threatens you. It could be a profile created by a person claiming to be you, or someone hacking into your profile and writing comments and making claims that look like they came from you. Here is a list of steps that you can take to make it stop:

- Ignore the person.
- Block or delete this person.
- Talk to someone you trust. Do not think you are alone.
- On social sites, you should always protect your sensitive information. You should keep your privacy settings on Facebook, Twitter or any other social sites set high. TIPS How to do so:
- Make your profile private. Only people you accept as friends or followers should see your profile, posts, tweets or photos. If a fake profile has been created, contact the provider to eliminate it.
- Keep some information private even to your followers or friends. Avoid posting the precise location of your house, personal phone numbers or passwords.
- Always log out from the social sites if you are sharing computer or using one at an internet cafe.
- If a recent friend or follower starts posting or tweeting inappropriate comments, block that person.
- If you keep receiving inappropriate private messages or comments from someone you know or do not know you, block that person.
- Even if your profile has the highest privacy settings and it is visible only to your friends or followers, anything that you post or tweet is public information. So if you want only certain people to know something, send them a private message/e-mail, or call or text them instead.
- Go off line for a while. This includes erasing your profile or closing it for a period of time.
- Change your personal information.

MAKING FRIENDS

The easiest way to make friends is to meet as many people as possible. Since you are an exchange student, your host family and other students at school will be curious to know you and where you are from.



Do not be shy! Making friends is always a good experience. Your new friends can help you out in everyday situations like adapting to the new school and attending classes. Besides, the more people you meet, the more opportunities you will have to make new friends!



Another great way to make friends is to participate in after-school or community activities that interest you, such as sports, visual arts, civics, performing arts, photography, theater, etc.



Being close to your host family is a good way to make friends! Host brothers and sisters can introduce you to their friends, new places and fun things to do!



Sometimes host siblings can be protective of their friends and may not want to share them with you. Do not feel bad about this. It is quite normal for siblings to each have their own friends, since everyone needs his/her own space.



Don't be choosy! You are new to your host country and this is your chance to learn and experience as much as you can, to know and understand what's going on around you.

Let's talk about culture's role! In some cultures...



People become friends easily. They form friendships with everyone they meet, usually by inviting new neighbors or friends over for coffee – and it can sometimes be impolite to refuse.



Individuals might interact very little with neighbors or friends they have in common. Or they might not contact people they consider strangers and instead count only the people they have known for years as friends.



Sometimes after you become friends you might be able to ask for special favors, such as getting a ride, sharing personal belongings or borrowing money for a bus ride. This is not always a general rule. You need to do what you feel most comfortable doing. If you do not feel safe or happy sharing your things you can always politely explain why.



Only friends who have known each other for a long time ask each other for special favors. Again, you need to feel okay with this. Under no circumstances should you feel forced to share money or belongings.

“I think the two most important things that you need to learn while you're abroad is patience and acceptance. In the beginning I wanted everything to happen quickly. I expected too much from myself and from others. After two weeks of school I was desperate because I had not that many friends yet. I talked with some people about my fear and my disappointment and they all told me I could not expect to have best friends after two weeks in school. I wanted everything to be fine, to be perfect and I blamed myself if something was not like it should be. But what I learned is that everything needs time and you need to accept that you cannot change how things go. Sometimes you should wait instead of worrying.” --Scarlet from Switzerland (exchange to Denmark)

Another way to make friends is to take advantage of special opportunities such as school field trips, cultural contests, tutoring, after-school events, volunteering or working on the school newspaper, for example.



In some countries where public transportation is not widely used, friends might want you to drive somewhere to meet up or offer to lend you their car. Since traffic laws and driving rules vary widely from country to country, YFU students are not allowed to drive under any circumstances. If you are asked to meet up somewhere far away from your host family's house, ask your friends or your host family for a ride or seek out public transportation.

Finally, a really good way to connect with friends and make new ones is through social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter. It will be natural for you to connect with your new friends online through the use of social media. Just remember to be careful what you share on these sites, and do not post things you would not want your host parents to read. REMEMBER that everything you post on the internet is PUBLIC! For your protection, that of your natural family and your host family, you should NEVER post personal information, such as your host/natural family's full name, private phone numbers, addresses, e-mail addresses, bank, school name, home town, personal pictures or any other sensitive information.



DATING

Dating someone from a different culture can be a unique experience. Besides the obvious benefits of romance, dating someone from a different culture can help you to better understand your host country. The person you are dating might be a perfect source of information. You will also be motivated to learn the language and perhaps you will build a friendship that will last beyond your stay.

Dating between two different cultures may create complications. Before you start dating someone, learn about dating habits in your host country. What is considered a date and what is considered just hanging out? You might also want to learn whether it matters who the first person to ask the other out is, or who pays for the date. Always consider how involved the natural and host parents should be. It is always a good idea to ask them for advice and permission.

It is a good idea to ask your host family whether it is culturally appropriate to date and ask them for permission. Keep in mind that dating or even having a relationship is not accepted in some cultures when you are on exchange. You should be aware of the fact that it might not be tolerated to even meet or hang around with friends of the opposite sex.



It is natural to connect with your boyfriend or girlfriend online, just remember to keep personal comments offline – everything you post on the internet is PUBLIC!

Remember that you will have to go back to your home country eventually. Sometimes the relationship may last, or sometimes it might just be a good friendship.



Beware of adults you do not know well who offer you gifts, invite you to participate in events or try to be close to you in any way you feel inappropriate. They might be trying to take advantage of you. It is important to discuss things like this with your host family to learn what is normal between teenagers and adults, and what the warning signs are. Even if it is someone you know who does something inappropriate, tell your host family or YFU. Always follow your instinct. If you do not feel comfortable, walk away or stop any contacts with this person and tell your host family and YFU.

FITTING IN AT A SMALL OR BIG SCHOOL

If your host school is small, you may get a lot of attention from fellow students because you are new and from a foreign place. Your friends, teachers and classmates will ask you questions. If you think the question sounds silly, do not feel offended or bothered, and answer the question the best you can. They do not know your culture and you might be the first and only chance they have to talk with somebody from a different country.

“After living in Haicheng, a small city situated in the South of China, I moved to Beijing for six months. I was amazed by the city because it was totally different from Haicheng. Beijing was bigger, cleaner and definitely crowded and with so many places to go like shopping malls, clubs, cafes and cinemas. My host family in Beijing was more open and serene to host an exchange student. In Haicheng I think we, the exchange students, were the first foreign people living there. The citizens of Haicheng were so shocked and amazed to see us. Often people at school or on the street asked us if we were movie stars, businessmen or VIPs. Every time we answered we were simply exchange students, Chinese people were so surprised and they often asked if they could take a picture of us, like they were paparazzi, and sometime they requested if they could publish the photos on QQ pages (it is the Chinese Facebook). Instead, my exchange was very different in Beijing because there it is normal to see foreign people from all over the world. I felt I was not special anymore. I was one of plenty of foreign people living in the capital.” --

Mateo from Ecuador (exchange to China)

You might be invited to participate in a special event, class trip or other activity. It will be good and interesting for you to accept the invitations you receive. Ask your host family for permission if the trip or the event will require you to be away from home for several hours or more.

If your school is big, you might receive less attention than you expected. If people do not ask you questions about your culture do not be surprised or offended, as they might think they know your country or seeing a foreign student studying in their school is not new to them.



SMALL SCHOOL

If it is acceptable in your host culture, introduce yourself to your teachers and classmates and ask them any appropriate questions related to your host culture, school and events.

You should get involved in after-school activities such as school trips, school sport teams, clubs and events. This will give you the chance to meet new students and make new friends.

“It is important to not be shy. I am at a big senior high school. I am a junior and everyone is new. A new exchange student is not that easy to detect in the crowd. I always had to approach people and, depending on the size of the class, this was sometimes harder to do than others. But it is important to join a club or a team to make friends and experience something new. I am in my school’s bowling team. Something completely different and a wonderful experience. I met my best friends there. Additionally you should always have an open ear, so that you can gain other people’s trust and a lot of friends appreciate that.”

-- Suzan from Germany (exchange to USA)

You might be invited to participate in some activities or events you do not want to attend. If you do not feel comfortable with what you are supposed to do, you can always say “no thank you”. You should also keep in mind that it is best for you to balance your social and school activities.



BIG SCHOOL



When your host family gives you permission to attend a party, go and enjoy yourself! The pressure to fit in might put you in a bad situation and that can have a negative impact on your experience.

The use of tobacco, e-cigarettes, drugs and alcohol among teenagers differs widely from country to country. YFU advises you not to use

any of these substances. Keep in mind that you must follow the laws of your host country as well as the rules of your host family.

Safety before everything else! If you are of legal age, but not used to drinking alcohol, be aware of how much you are consuming.

The use of any illegal drugs is prohibited for all students in YFU programs.

It is normal to feel uncomfortable when offered these things at a party. If you are,

Say “no, thanks” if you are invited to do or try something you do not want to.

Walk away if you feel pressured! Your safety and well-being are the priorities.



YFU POLICIES STATE THAT STUDENTS WHO ABUSE THE USE OF ALCOHOL OR DRUGS WILL BE CONSIDERED FOR EARLY RETURN. SO BE AWARE OF THIS POLICY AND BE CAREFUL! YFU VALUES YOUR SAFETY!

“So it is said that you learn from your mistakes. But for me I guess I had to make the same mistake twice to really understand and learn from it. I want you all to know that I am leaving the United States this Tuesday because I made some bad choices while being here. It started to get serious on New-year eve when I went to a party and got home drunk. My host parents did the only right thing and called the YFU. They decided to give me a second chance, and I was super grateful for that and I told myself that I would never do this again! Well, this Sunday I went to a party again and I got home, I was totally out of it and someone had probably put something in the drink I had. YFU came on the door next day with a drug test to see what was in my system. The only thing that came up was marijuana, and that was not surprising, because I had done marijuana with my friends! For me it sounded really fun to do something like this, it felt rebellious and exciting! There is also a saying that you don’t realize what you have until you lose it, and that it exactly how I feel. I was selfish and really stupid, because I was not able to say the little word no... it changed my whole year and not only did I hurt myself! I hurt my friends, and both of my families! So by writing this I hope that you all can learn from my mistakes. It is so easy to just say NO! This is a once in a lifetime experience, don’t throw it away because of something this stupid. Please, just say no.”
--YFU student

All in all, it is a good idea to be an **observer** at the beginning of your stay. The more you see and understand what other people are doing, the easier it will be to fit in and feel at home.

Ask your host parents, brothers or sisters advice on what teenagers in your host community usually do. In this way you will learn what local teens take part in, and you can try those things yourself.



ADJUSTING TO SCHOOL

Going to school in another country is really similar to living with a host family. Studying in a different school is a great learning experience. You will learn different methods of studying, different ways of writing and more importantly, how to approach problems and be successful in dealing with them.

“The enormous Jeep stopped outside the red-bricked entrance of my new school. My heart skipped a beat. Station Camp High School, the sign said. Just from looking at the name I could tell this would be a whole new lifestyle in what seemed to be a totally different world. My first thought was: camp? As in boot camp?! Was I really entering what my dictionary defined as ‘an induction or orientation program for students, designed to push recruits to their limits’?”

That day I entered several different classrooms. Every time I found my way to a new classroom I sat down in a small and claustrophobic ‘stall’. The classrooms all contained curious looks coming from the other students. They looked curious to me too, yet I found several similarities in our differences. Among my Danish friends I had always been one of the shortest. All of a sudden I felt like I had grown several inches, I was now one of the tall ones. I was one of the few Danish brunettes, and now I suddenly was one among many. In Denmark I was just a regular student, now I was an exchange student.

As the days passed on I got more and more used to my new lifestyle, and this whole different world soon became a big part of my life. I found out that the camp Station Camp High School does not stand for boot camp. I found out that the students are a lot like me despite our different native tongue.” --Anja from Denmark (exchange to USA)

You will have quite a big adjustment to make when going to a new school. You are going to encounter things you are not used to. But do not feel defeated. Teachers and classmates can help you out. If you feel overwhelmed by the workload for example, ask the teacher or your host family for help!

Going to a new school will give you an in-depth view of teen life in a different country. It will be the best way to understand the academic culture of your host country. It is a great way to improve your knowledge of your host country.

You should always engage actively in school. Even if the year does not count at home there are so many things you can learn in school – especially about the culture.



If you have trouble adjusting to differences between the school system in your host country and your home country, ask your teachers and host family to give you advice. If you don't understand the rules to enroll in classes, prepare for lessons, follow general school rules or do your homework, simply ask!! It is better to ask for advice than trying to cope alone.

If your school rules confuse you, ask your host family or teachers to explain them.

GRADES AND CREDITS

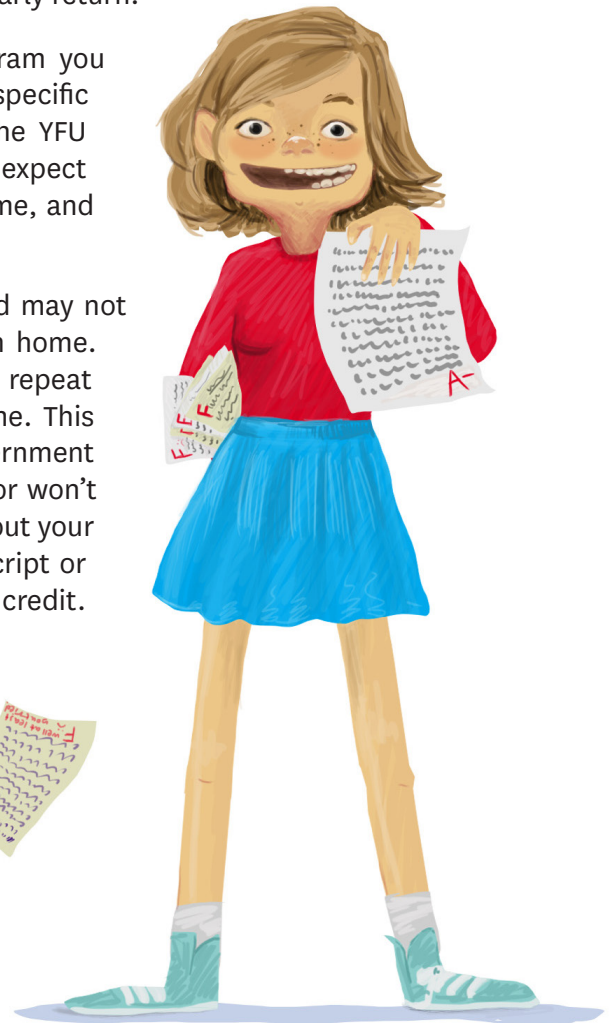
Attending school is required on all YFU academic programs. Repeated and unexcused absences will result in consideration for early return.

In order to successfully complete your exchange program you should find out in advance if you need to pass exams or specific assignments. Start by checking with your host school or the YFU office in your host country. Keep in mind that your teachers expect you to be active in class and complete all assignments on time, and to the best of your ability.

Please be aware that course-work that you complete abroad may not be accepted for credit or considered valid when you return home. In other words, you should know that you might have to repeat the academic term or certain courses when you return home. This depends completely on your home school and/or government policies. YFU cannot guarantee what your home school will or won't accept. Before leaving for your exchange, ask your school about your possible options. Sometimes they will require a grade transcript or official letter from your host school in order for you to receive credit.

Even if you cannot earn credit, it doesn't mean your time abroad was lost. The exchange experience will give you an opportunity to study subjects in a different way, try new subjects and learn concepts and ideas that you may not find in your own school.

Be aware that taking your school attendance and performance seriously is not only important for your own personal experience. If you take it seriously, it will open doors for you and have a positive impact on your exchange stay. But it is also important to take a serious approach to your school situation, because you are attending as a guest. If the school finds that you are under-motivated, it may have negative repercussions for their cooperation with YFU and their willingness to accept exchange students in future.



EXPLORING YOUR NEW SURROUNDINGS

Get to know your new neighborhood, both where your host family lives and where your school is located. Ask your host family to introduce you to the area – to walk you around the surroundings, to show you the best and most interesting places and shops. Also ask them when and where it is safe to go, if you need to have someone come with you, and places to avoid even if you are with a group of people.



Make sure to take note where all the buildings and offices you might need are located, such as the post office, the library, the bank and the supermarket.

Depending on the size of your host town, try to take a bus, ride a bicycle or walk around just to see what it is like. This will help you learn how to get around or make arrangements to get where you need to go.

“A few days after my arrival in my host family, school was supposed to start. So, I joined my host brother and my host sister on the way to the school bus stop. I was so excited to finally start school in my exchange year that I did not pay too much attention to the environment, to the school bus or the route we were taking. I relied on my host brother and my host sister to get to school. However, I did not think about that fact that my host brother, my host sister and I had different schedules and would probably not meet before going back home after school. So, after my first American school day was over and it was time to go back home, I left the school building and stood alone in front of a parking lot full of orange school buses, all looking alike. Soon I noticed that they all had different numbers, but I had not paid attention to the number of the bus I arrived on in the morning. So I spent a few minutes to remember the number or the route we took that same morning. Finally, I boarded the bus I thought was the right one, however, without being really sure. Only half way through its tour I realized that it was the wrong bus. When all the other kids had already been dropped off I approached the bus driver and explained the situation. Thankfully, he agreed to drive me back close to where my host family lived. I swore to myself that next time I will definitely write down the number of my bus and pay more attention to the new environment I lived in!”
-- Marcus from Germany (exchange to USA)

Sometimes it is a good idea to get lost (a little bit!) around your neighborhood to learn your surroundings and discover unexpected places. But be careful! Ask your host parents if it is safe, go only in daylight and bring a map in case you want to check where things are. Finally, bring a phone with important numbers.

If you take a taxi, bus or other public transportation, make sure you know how much it costs and where and how to buy tickets. It is also a good idea to check timetables and routes, so you will be on time going in the right direction. You should be aware that different ways of transport are common in different countries. So, you might be asked to not take the public bus, but rather a taxi because it is safer. Host parents know what is appropriate in their area.

Make note of public buildings, museums, and other places you want to visit and you would like to explore later. Ask your host family or friends if they know anything about these sites and if they would like to come along with you.

You should also make a “bucket list” of things that you want to try before your exchange is over. Keep in mind that you might not be able to do everything because there will always be unexpected things to do or you might want to change your plan along the way.

“I always say: TRY EVERYTHING!! When you get chance to join something like club, sports, church or whatever, you should join them!! You will always have the chance to meet new nice people, which makes your exchange year fantastic!! I am not a very organized person so at the beginning of my exchange I visit the things that I heard about but I always had the feeling I was not doing enough! My host mum had the idea to make a bucket list of things I wanted to do and not only places I wanted to visit. In this way I had the opportunity to visit historical houses and shops far away my host home. (I really enjoyed the chocolate factory - they had ‘all you can eat’ buffet!!!) But I also had the chance to join the soccer club and the drama club as well. I met so many nice people and have the opportunity to do so many groups activities!!”
--Yuki from Japan (exchange to USA)



STAY ACTIVE AND INVOLVED

Try to stay involved while you are living in your host country. This will allow you to enjoy your exchange more. Be aware of the things that are happening in your host country and notice different aspects of the culture that you cannot learn from books and classes.



Watch TV news and read newspapers or stories on the internet to stay informed about current events in your host country. Find some interesting blogs that talk about the situation of a particular region of the country. You might find something interesting and it may lead to a trip with your host family to explore a new place.



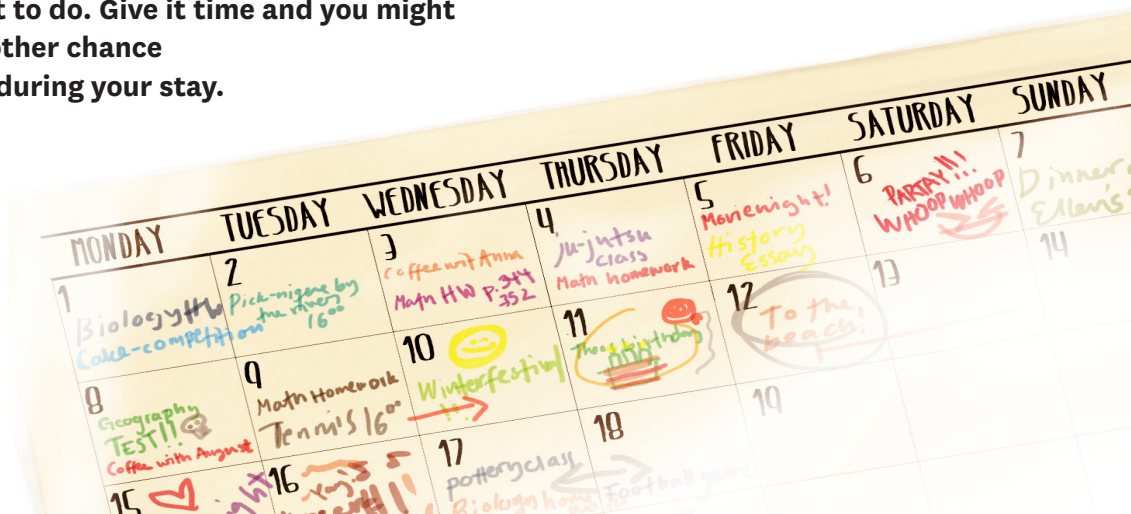
Get involved in your family, school and community activities. There is always a chance to volunteer for projects or events that interest you. Besides, you will gain a first-hand experience of your host country life.



Stay in touch with your new friends through Facebook and Twitter or other social media sites. Here you will see ways to get involved in promoted events.



Do not forget that staying in touch and involved will give you the opportunity to become a real “citizen” of another country! But do not feel bad if you cannot do all the activities that you want to do. Give it time and you might have another chance later on during your stay.



BE OPEN-MINDED

RELIGION

Religion can play an important role not only within your host family but also generally in your host country. Keep in mind that religion, as well as attitudes toward personal beliefs, varies greatly from country to country and from family to family.

If religion plays a large role in your personal life and in your natural family, but it is not a relevant part of your host family values and views, make sure your host family knows what role religion plays in your life. Let them know if you would like to attend religious services and ask where you can find a place to do so. On the other hand, if religion is not important to you, or you never thought about it, but religion is important for your host family and in your host country, you will need to recognize what impact that may mean for everyday life.



If your host family attends religious services, go with them at least once. You can be present at a traditional religious service of your host country. This may help you understand more about your host family or culture in general, and about your own culture, religion and personal beliefs.

Keep in mind that even if you and your host family practice different religions, it does not mean you will have misunderstandings or problems. It is instead a great way to learn more about yourself and your culture. Looking inward at your own beliefs is always good for personal growth.

“I guess an important aspect of my exchange has been religion. I am not Catholic. Actually, I’m an atheist. And I’ve been to two Catholic countries: Ireland and Chile.

It has been quite different during the second part of my exchange even if not problematic. Ireland, from the European point of view, is deeply Catholic, but Chile is even more! My family there was well aware that I didn’t believe in God and we joked a lot about this. However, it has been pretty much different at school. According to my host dad, this school was ‘almost Opus Dei’: prayer every morning, mass every week, and some religious class!

I admit it has made me uneasy sometimes: when after two days at school you are the only one

of your class not willing to go to an optional mass, they all stare at you asking ‘Why?!’, you have to debate! When you have to argue for ten minutes with a teacher because you don’t want to be blessed... I’m not even baptized; I’m theoretically not even allowed to go. Well, these are some examples that it is not always easy to deal with. But I can’t blame anybody for that and I did not have any real problem: my best friends were leaders in an active Catholic youth group, I really enjoyed my religion classes and have learnt a lot of really interesting things. What I dislike the most I would say was this horrible week with four masses in five days, including one of three hours.

But I will never forget this day, when some girls, friends of mine, told me with assurance: ‘Don’t worry Sarah, before you leave, you will believe in God’. Do I have to mention that I am still not going to church? I would finally say that confronting my view to these new opinions have made me even surer of what were my beliefs.”

-- Sarah from Belgium (exchange to Ireland and Chile)

POLITICS

As is true with religion, political points of view can greatly vary from country to country, from family to family and from person to person. Sometimes, confronting people on political issues can create debates, especially if there are elections in your host country during your stay.

Attitudes towards political discussions may be very different: If you are used to discussing politics in everyday conversation, be aware that politics might not be an appropriate topic of conversation in your host family or with your friends. Be mindful of what you say! Never assume peoples’ opinions before you learn them. On the other hand, if you are not used to sharing your political views, be aware that politics might be a favorite topic of discussion within your family and in your host country. Also, you might be asked to share your opinion about the political situation of your country, or give an opinion of the political parties of your host country. Either way, if you do not have an opinion or you feel uncomfortable talking about politics, feel free to decline. If this happens though, you should at least try your best to share your own views in a polite way. Try to describe the different political views held in your home country as well.

It might sound funny to you, but in some countries, topics like sports or arts may play an important role in people’s lives. Generally, you should keep it in mind to listen politely to others’ opinions and reflect on the reason why certain topics can be so important to them. It is important to respect the passion that people can have for sports or other kind of hobbies, even if you do not!!





Culture shock can happen to anyone. It is often true that the more you have learned about your host country before you go, the easier your adjustment will be. But keep in mind that it is the daily experience with different ways of thinking that can cause physical and emotional reactions. Experiencing and adjusting to cultural differences can gradually lead to stress and confusion. Keeping up with all these unfamiliar situations and habits - that you need to face differently - can be exhausting. While not everyone experiences a “culture fatigue”, everyone goes through some adjustments. This time during which you figure out how to adjust to the new environment is considered “culture shock”. The feeling of exhaustion and frustration is “culture shock” as well.

When you are in this situation you might go through contrasting feelings but every individual experiences it differently.

- A feeling of helplessness and desire to depend on other people of your own nationality
- Anger with delays and other minor frustrations, which are really insignificant
- Not wanting to learn more of the language of the country
- Fear of being cheated, robbed or injured
- Fear of going to new places, doing new things
- Homesickness - wanting to be back home
- Physical symptoms such as too much or too little sleep, stomachaches, headaches or frequent crying.

Experiencing culture shock is perfectly normal and it does not mean you have failed and you cannot be a good exchange student. Instead you should talk about how you feel. This can help you get past the feeling of frustration, confusion, exhaustion, and sometimes anger that come with culture shock. So talk to your host family, friends or other exchange students!!!

“I have been an international student for so many years. I have always loved travelling around the world and meeting new people and new cultures. So this year I decided to do an internship in the U.S. thinking that my previous experience and my personal background would have helped me to face any difficulties. I have also thought that the US would not be very different from Italy, my natural country, or UK where I lived for more than 2 years. Well, I can honestly say I was wrong.

Even after all these years abroad and all the experience I can honestly say that I experienced the culture shock. And it all happened in a supermarket. Normal grocery shopping, but that day nothing seemed to be good enough! All the food seemed to me just junk food or pre-cooked one. Not the best. Even the fruits did not smell as I was used to in Italy. I suddenly felt so frustrated and depressed. And the fancy Italian names to promote food that were clearly American – and in my eyes looked just funny and ironic – made me feel even worse. Well, what I learned from this experience is to buy genuine American food – better in taste and quality – and stop shopping in a cheap supermarket!! But of course, more importantly, I understood that it does not exist any culture that will not make you feel exhausted even after years spent abroad.” --Alessandra from Italy (exchange to USA)

**DO NOT LET CULTURE SHOCK AFFECT YOUR JUDGEMENT
OF YOUR HOST CULTURE!! REMEMBER IT IS NOT GOOD
OR BAD – JUST DIFFERENT**

Here are some **practical ideas** that can help you deal with culture shock:

- Remember that most people have these feelings. Do not worry that you are “the only one” who feels this way.
- Decide what particular things are bothering you, no matter how small or unimportant.
- Analyze the differences between your values and ideas and those with which you are living in your host country. Which ones seem in conflict?
- Learn how to live with these differences. You do not have to worry that you will lose your own culture. It is a part of you. But you can try living in the new culture and you can accomplish something. For example, buy something in a different shop, talk to someone new, and accept an invitation to go somewhere. BEING ACTIVE is the key!

- Don't forget to RELAX!! Take a deep breath, and be glad you have the opportunity to live in a country different from your own. Learn to accept new ideas and ways of life without forgetting your own.

“Around the second week of my exchange I began to wonder why I was not experiencing any culture shock, I felt cheated. I had read about it, but I was not experiencing any. I was disappointed, and began to think that I was different than the other students.

*After few weeks, I had an introduction day with YFU India. It was at this meeting that for the first time I understood that I had been in a profound culture shock, even before I had arrived in India. It was when I landed in Doha, and I experienced 40 C heat for the first time, that I went into shock. At the airport in Doha I became totally negative, and decided that living in such heat was impossible, also, when I looked around the airport I saw that I was different, and I felt alone, and frightened. Looking back, I now see that all it took was the heat and feeling different. I had never experienced anything like it in my life. I am able to smile now, when I realize that I had already rejected India, before I had even arrived.” --**Sunniva from Norway (exchange to India)***

SAFETY

You may think you are mature enough to decide what is best for you. BUT, no matter how capable you are at home, you may not have all the information you need to make the best judgment when you are living in another culture. If you are used to feeling independent and “street smart” (comfortable to move around your city) in your home country, you may not be able to do so in your new town. Be aware that in your host country you might not be allowed to go to certain places alone, or to certain places considered unsafe or unacceptable. These “rules” are very different from country to country and culture to culture.

Remember, following rules will show you that you are mature and grown up. Doing whatever you want without knowing the host country culture can put you in serious danger.

“At home, in my natural country, I am used to being quite independent. I used to be able to do pretty much whatever I want, time to time I have to inform my parents with the occasional text home, and to have my phone with me so my parents are able to reach me. This was not the case with my host family. One weekend, at the beginning of my stay, I was going to sleep at friend’s house after a concert. So I checked with my host parent, who agreed to let me go and stay at my friend’s house. However they added a few conditions: ‘We want your friend’s home address, her phone number, her parents’ number, and we’ll also make a call to her parents to see if this is okay with them.’ I could not believe my ears! Did they honestly not trust me enough to sleep at a friend’s house? Did they think I was incapable of planning my stay-over with her parents? I was 17 years old, not 8! Never had I been so insulted!

At my friend’s house I explained the situation to my friend, apologized for my host parents being such a bother and complained about how insulted I felt. She then told me that after my host parents had talked to her mom, her mom had said that I was very lucky: my host parents really cared about me. Even though this hurt my pride at the time, I’ve now realized that this was no insult towards my ability to take care of myself. My host parents just wanted to make sure I would be safe.”
--Elisabeth from Sweden (exchange to France)

Your host parents are responsible for your safety. They are committed to giving you the best experience possible and ensuring your successful adjustment. Your host family and YFU know more about living in the host country than you do and they have your best interests in mind. So if they advise you not to do certain things, respect their judgments and try not to resent their rules. You can ask your host family if there are certain neighborhoods you should avoid or if you should bring someone along when visiting certain areas. Before going out, always let your host family know where you will be and how to reach you.

In an emergency call the police!! Make sure you have the police, fire rescue and ambulance's numbers.

Always be aware of your surroundings and company:

If you are with someone you do not know, be aware of their behavior towards you compared to that of your friends and host family. If you feel uncomfortable or you feel that the behavior is inappropriate call your host family, local area representative or walk away.

Ask a friend or family member to go to new places with you. There is safety in numbers, and in a threatening situation they will know better how to react, what to do and where to go.

If you feel uncomfortable, ask someone you trust – friends or a member of your host family to take you home. It is really important to know your host family's address especially if you need to quickly leave a threatening situation.

If someone – that you know or do not know – asks you to do something that makes you feel in danger, you should say no! Then walk away. Your personal safety should be your priority!! If they persist, call your host family to come and get you or if it is an emergency call the police.

Following the law

While you are on your YFU exchange, you are expected to follow all the local laws of the country and area in which you are placed. If you break a law while on a YFU program, the nature and seriousness of the offense or crime will determine the consequences and possible outcome. Breaking the law can lead to an early return from the YFU program of an exchange student. This includes e.g. shoplifting, theft and any criminal prosecution.




AN EXCHANGE YEAR IS GENERALLY LESS FUN IF SPENT IN PRISON

CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAYS


In almost every culture there are special holidays that are important to all or especially to your host family. Holidays are usually a fun time, but it can also be challenging to learn all the traditions and practices. There may also be solemn holidays that are observed to honor your host country's history. What is most important is that holidays are a time for you to learn more about your host family and country's culture.

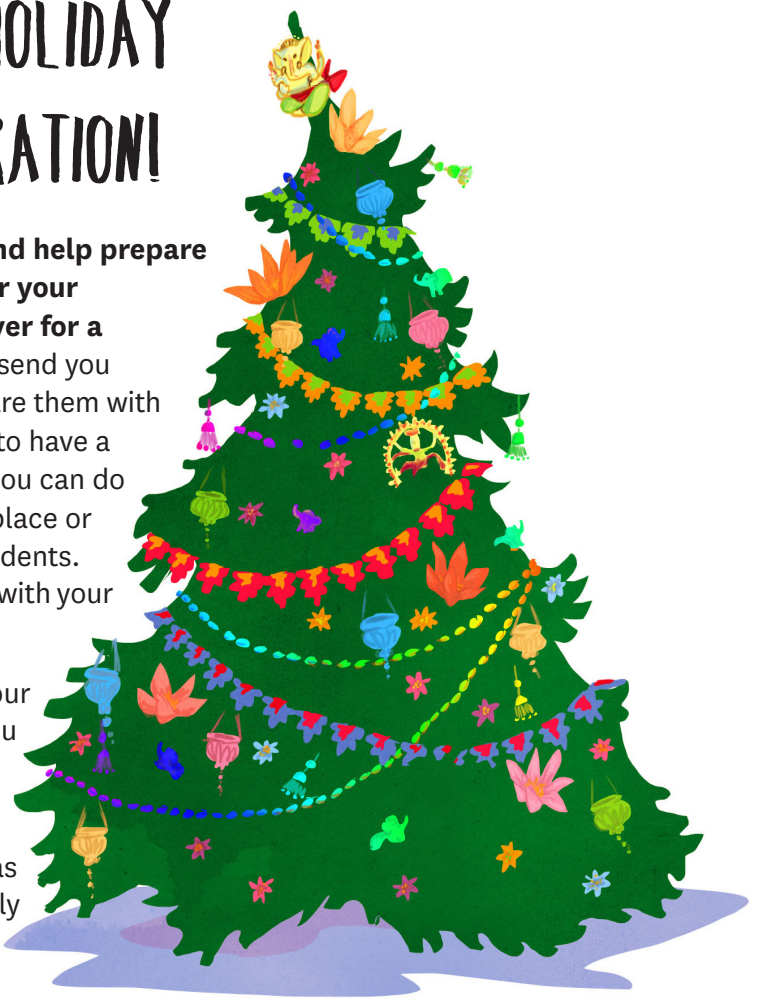
If your host country does not celebrate the same holidays or celebrates them in a very different way than your natural family, you might feel lonely or sad because you are missing an important occasion back home. You might feel homesick or miss celebrating with your natural family.

INSTEAD OF MISSING A HOLIDAY MAKE YOUR OWN CELEBRATION!

 **Ask your host family for permission and help prepare a special dish, decorate your room or your host family house, and invite friends over for a celebration.** Ask your natural parents to send you some special items of your holiday. You can share them with your friends and host family. If it's not possible to have a celebration on the holiday in your host house, you can do something else special. You can visit a special place or organize an event at school with your fellow students. This is a great and fun way to share your culture with your host family and new friends.

If the holidays are celebrated differently in your host country than what you were used to, you may find it difficult to participate.

 **You can integrate your tradition with the host country one.** Try to be as involved as possible with your host family celebration and try to share with them your own family tradition. It is always a good thing to explain your views or beliefs regarding a holiday. This discussion is a great way to learn more about your host family tradition and share your tradition too.



Try your best to be sociable. You may feel left out of a holiday if your host family has a lot of members and the celebration is big and busy. This occasion can be hard, because you might feel homesick. But your host family has invited you because they think you are important and part of the family. They are just trying to make you feel at home.

“One thing that I found different but lovely here in Switzerland is the... SNOW! This is the first time in my life I see the snow, the first time that I can play with it. I think this is really perfect. This year will be my first Christmas with snow! Well, in Brazil we have Christmas and it is pretty similar to the Christmas in Europe, because of our Portuguese colonization, the Christian belief being really common and European tradition brought to my country. However, during Christmas time, in Brazil it is a freaking hot summer. But now, thanks to being in Switzerland I will have my first Christmas with snow. You have no idea how cool is this for me!” --Joao from Brazil (exchange to Switzerland)



You may experience holidays that are new to you. This can be an exciting because you will experience something completely different, get to taste new foods and learn special traditions that you might never have heard about before. Ask if it's possible to take an active part in the celebration. This will make you feel more accepted.

Ask your host family the meaning behind the celebration. Knowing why a holiday is celebrated will make you more aware of your host country's traditions, beliefs and values. It will be a great occasion to reflect on your own holidays and the reasons why you celebrate them.

NEW HOLIDAYS ARE FUN!

“In the last 3 days here in Kongsberg - Norway was just like in the books by Astrid Lindgren, only 10 times more.

The atmosphere that we have here is incredible, almost indescribable. Perhaps, I need to mention that here the weather condition can be extreme. It is around minus 17/18 degrees and there is snow everywhere.

In the morning when I go to school, the snow crunches under my feet, the whole sky is filled with twinkling stars; behind every window of the little red, white, yellow or brown houses you can see candlelight and other Christmas' decorations. The atmosphere is incredible. Everything here is frozen, even the great river. However, you cannot walk comfortably - it's too cold.

Saturday was the First of December, the start of the Christmas season. We heard from morning to evening Christmas music, ate only Grøt (porridge) and drank only Gløgg (hot, spiced wine).

Overall, we have 6 different Christmas calendars and I have the feeling we all have regressed into young children running around happily in the snow. On Saturday I went with my host mother to the cinema and we saw a children's Christmas movie. On Sunday we were in a 'Christmas street' here in Kongsberg, where little kids were running around everywhere wearing red caps and Norwegian sweaters.” --Anna from Switzerland (exchange to Norway)

SHOWING APPRECIATION FOR YOUR HOST FAMILY

Host families are people who have generously offered to open their house and life to young people from another country. It is important to be polite and respectful of both the family members and their belongings.

Being polite means to thank your host family when they do something for you, such as preparing dinner, giving you a ride to school or helping you to solve some problems.

To show your appreciation, every once in a while do something extra special for your host family like cooking a typical or special, planning a family outing, inviting them to a school event or buying or making something meaningful.

It may be a nice to give your host family a gift. Choosing the best time to do this can differ depending on your situation. You might think that it is a good idea to give a typical present from your country at the beginning of your stay. Sometimes you will feel that it is more meaningful to give it at the end of your stay. Or you can choose a special moment that may have a lot of meaning for you or your host family. Your new friends can help you learn what is appropriate.



It is useful to bring with you several small gifts. You will then be prepared for unexpected situations like meeting new people or a birthday that you were not prepared for.

The gift you give should not be too large or expensive. The best present is something that you know your host family will enjoy and shows appreciation for everything they have done for you. Or it can be something typical from your country. Or, it could be something personal that explains to them your personality and values, like a collection of things you liked about the host country.

There are other ways to show appreciation to your host family: writing a letter or postcard, cleaning the house, saying “I like what you did for me”, sending an e-mail or text saying you are thankful that they are your host family.

You can show your appreciation even after the exchange program is over. After you go back to your country, keeping in touch with your host family and friends is a good way to show how much you cared for them. Your host family too can be curious about your well-being back in your natural country.

“When I started writing e-mail with my host sister before my exchange year, I knew we would get along great. As it turned out I was right. We do get along great. She and my host parents made this year the most mesmerizing experience in my young life. This already tells you that leaving my family after ten months was heartbreaking. Of course, I had been showing my appreciation whenever possible. I had chosen my gifts for them carefully when I left my home country, trying to keep in mind their preferences. Warm hearted as they all are, they did not care about the present themselves. They just appreciated the gesture. I do not think I can even recall what I got for them. I loved to my parents smile so of course I made sure I said ‘Thank you’ when my dad drove my sister and me to school or when he dropped me off at the swimming pool. But I especially tried to spend some two-on-two time with each one of them. My dad and I went to his hunt camp because I enjoyed spending time with him and I knew he loved to tell me about outdoors and his hunting stories. Mom and I spend mother- daughter time in the kitchen when I helped her cooked and once made a German dish for my family. My sister and I were a different story. She is not much of a talking person but every now and then when we could not sleep we would start wandering through the house. Somehow we almost met in the kitchen and then we talked about some sister stuff; school, friends, gossip, the usual.

When I had to leave, I left little notes throughout the house knowing my family would find them. The notes said things like ‘I miss your cooking’ or ‘Thanks for all the shopping’. When I visited again 18 months later, my mom showed me she kept all the notes in a little cup she inherited from her grandmother. Also, my sister visited me during summer break the next year. And she is welcome back.

Showing appreciation was and still is important for me because without their hospitality my exchange year would not have been the same. Your family is what makes this year so unique.”

--Marla from Germany (exchange to USA)



CULTURAL SHARING IS A TWO-WAY STREET

An exchange is not only a one-way experience. You will learn about your host culture while at the same time teach your host family and friends about your home culture. Your host family has opened their house to you because they wanted to share their values and traditions, but along the way they will be able to learn yours as well. Cultural sharing is the best way to open your mind to the experience and to anyone you might meet during your stay.



When you have a misunderstanding, explain to your family and friends how the situation would be handled back home.



When you do not understand something or the explanation your host family has given you, tell them what you did not understand and let them explain again what the problem was.



When you try to do something new, tell your host family and friends if there is anything similar in your home country. Explain why you feel these experiences are similar or why this new experience reminds you of something back home.

"I thought how glad I was I had asked my Japanese host mum to teach me how to make Japanese food. As we worked side by side, my host mum showing me by example how to cook, I found that cooking was one of her passions. And for that I was glad, in discovering one shared passion, we had become much closer, our once awkward relationship becoming more one of a mother and daughter. One day we decided to cook Japanese curry together. The carrots, beef, and celery swimming in the thick brown sauce reminded me much of stew from my native country, but its sweet, spicy smell was entirely different. So I decided to teach to my host mum how to cook beef stew, as my natural mum taught me years ago. It was experiences

like these, our togetherness both in the kitchen and around the table that really mattered.”
--Gretchen from USA (exchange to Japan)

Use each new experience as an opportunity to learn more about your host culture and view these occasions as an opportunity to educate yourself about different values. Even challenging moments can be a good way to learn and teach.

Finally, your exchange program experience is not only about learning a new culture. It is also a chance for your host family to learn about your culture as well. After all, your host family has opened their house to you, so they might open their mind to your beliefs and values.

COMMUNICATION!



It is normal for you to face some adjustment problems during your exchange. If you need help you will have people to assist you. Simply ask for help!

If you are having difficulties with anything, such as homesickness, language, making friends, keeping up in school or experiencing difficulties adjusting to the new culture, it is best to ask your host family for help and advice first. You and your host family will be able to solve the majority of the problems that come up. You are part of the family, and like in your natural family, your “parents” are concerned with your well-being.



Even if your problem is within the host family or relationships with family members, you should talk to them about any misunderstanding or issue you might have.



Your host parents may not realize that they are doing something that bothers you. But if you bring it to their attention they will have a chance to fix the problem, or help you understand the reason why they behave in certain way.



You may feel uncomfortable with speaking directly to your host family. But if you can work together on issues, your relationship will definitely improve and become deeper.

If your host family has hosted exchange students before, they have experience helping students deal with common difficulties. Your host family will also make adjustments to make you feel at home, so let your family help you get through the hard times. BUT keep in mind that your host family might have very particular expectations, because they might always compare you with the students they hosted before, which can lead to some difficulties. It will also improve your relationship with your host family if you are honest with them about any issues you are facing. If you are having a hard time, and do not confide in and trust your host family, they may get worried or become confused by your behavior.

It is perfectly normal to want to contact your natural parents and tell them that you are having difficulties. But remember they are not familiar with or aware of the entire situation in your host family. So asking for help from your natural parents is not the quickest way to solve the problem.

Wait before contacting your parents if you want to talk about day-to-day difficulties. Try instead to talk with your host family. More importantly, give yourself time to work it through and understand the situation. Before unnecessarily worrying your parents, you may find that the issue has improved or been resolved thanks to the cooperation with your host family. Your local YFU area representative is also important to contact should you have problems with your host family that you need to talk about.

“I now realize that trust is very important when you are in a country so culturally different than your own, such as India. And that it is very important to believe that YFU has your best interests at heart. If you do not do that you will, probably, go home. It is natural to talk to your parents at home, and take their advice; however it took me ten weeks to understand that they could not help, even though they wanted to.”
--**Sunniva from Norway (exchange to India)**



Without communication it is quite possible there will be misunderstandings that make your home stay less comfort.



Sharing your problems with your host family will help them get to know you better, and demonstrate that you appreciate their help and are making an effort to be part of their family.

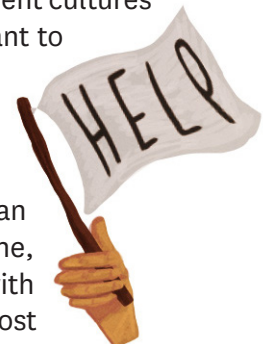
Remember that contacting your parents every time you are experiencing some troubles may give them the wrong impression. They may start thinking that your experience is really troublesome.



It is better to stick to a schedule if you want to contact your parents. This will give you time to think about and react to your experience and emotions first. Then, when you have contact with your parents, you can share both the good and bad experiences. This will give them a better feeling about your decision to participate in a home stay program.

YFU staff and volunteers, specifically your local area representative, can help you to solve normal, day-to-day problems. Additionally, they will be able to assist you with legal, visa, medical or emergency issues that you might face. YFU has over 60 years of experience working with different cultures and students, so they can understand many of the challenges you face. It is important to contact your local YFU volunteer if you have problems with your host family that you need to talk about. Try to be honest and open when you request help from your YFU volunteer.

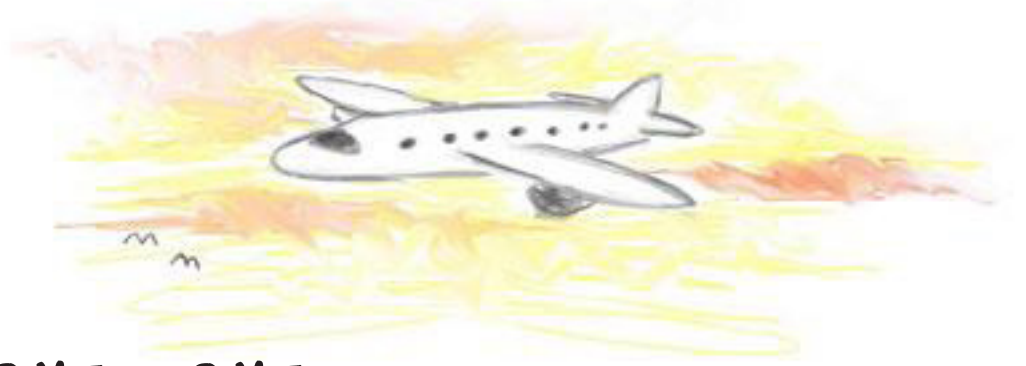
It is important to call your YFU volunteer once in a while and work together, so you can form a two-way relationship. If you never contact the volunteer and always say I am fine, the volunteer cannot build trust with you. This trust will be needed when dealing with bigger problems later on. The volunteer is like your “lifeline” for you outside of the host family.



YFU staff or volunteers should contact you once a month to see how you are doing, if your arrangement is working and how you are getting along with your host family and friends.

If you feel your local area volunteer is not able to solve your problem, contact your **HOST COUNTRY** YFU office. If needed, they will in turn contact your **HOME COUNTRY** YFU office to correct any mistakes or problems. YFU provides you with a support network. The regional, district and/or national YFU office(s) of your host country will be able to draw on a wide array of resources to help you in challenging situations.

Your volunteer or the host country YFU office can help you get in contact with an embassy or consulate if you need help with legal documents, visas, special permission or generally legal information. YFU is available at several levels to help you have the best experience ever.



TIME TO COME HOME

You have always known that you would be going home, but suddenly the time is upon you! Even though you may feel excited about your return, you also feel sad that it has come to an end. It is normal by the end of your exchange, to feel both happy to go home and sad you have to leave. You have made good friends, built a relationship with your host family and experienced a different way of life. It is normal to have mixed feelings. Just when you finally adjust yourself and feel at home in the host culture, the experience ends. BUT the exchange experience is only complete when you return home and re-integrate what you have come to know about yourself and the world to your home environment.



You should prepare yourself mentally and emotionally for when you need to start packing and sending home extra things that you have collected during your home stay. It will be tempting to pretend that the last day of your stay is way ahead and that you don't need to prepare.



Try to think of what you are going to miss of your host culture, and try to experience those things once again in the weeks before you leave. Go to your favorite restaurant, cook the food you like most or attend special cultural events, play a favorite game with your friends or host family or plan a short trip to some place you have wanted to visit. You could even take photos of your favorite place, friends, food and rooms in your host family's home.

If you leave the packing and farewell to the last day, you may miss out on a great opportunity to make your departure easier and more fun. You do not want to find yourself rushing furiously in the last two days, and in this situation the only conversation possible is going to be about passports, flight schedules and tickets – not happy memories and plans to stay in touch.



Take time to reflect on leaving. Try to recognize your mixed feelings so you can understand how they affect you as you get ready to depart. In this way you can soften the impact they have on you.

Try to think about what you are most looking forward to once you get home. You might make plans to eat the food you like and missed the most, visit your relatives and friends, visit a special place or just get back to your normal routine. You might also get ready for the things you will need to do such as register for classes, buy school supplies or go back to work.

This is also the time to prepare to readjust to your own culture. If you think you will not face any problems when you get back home, you might return home unprepared to cope with them. It may seem easy to go back to the culture you grew up with, but you might discover your perception of situations, people and things has changed during your time abroad. **It is not simple to return home and think that this exchange has not happened to you and the new experience did not change you.**

Things might have changed at home too, so be prepared that everything might not be just the same as it was before. It is not possible to deal with these changes before you return, but it might be helpful to think about them in a positive way. You will need to adapt to your home country just like you had to adapt to your host country.

“I got to know the value of time during my exchange to the USA. I never knew that time was so important. Every single day of my life meant something. Every day I got to learn something from my host family and friends around me. I was enjoying my exchange so much that I never imagined that there would be a day when I would have to go back to India. Finally when I got my air tickets in the mail, I was ambivalent. On one side I was excited about going back to my home country and meeting all my friends and on the other side of the coin I was so depressed about leaving my host country. I had no idea about how I would say goodbye to so many people who taught me so much in that one year. The thought of saying goodbye to my host family and friends was like a nightmare. I had no words to express my feelings. My friends wanted to hang out with me as much as they could but I wanted to be with my host family at the same time. Managing everything was the hardest part. Moreover, the thought of packing all my stuff in a single bag was scary. I could not decide between the stuff I was leaving behind and taking along with me to India because every single thing was so important to me.”

--Sahil from India (exchange to USA)



Leaving can be hard, and you might feel that you want to stay longer. If you want to extend your exchange, you first need to talk to your host family and YFU representatives. It may not be possible to stay longer depending on the policies and rules of your YFU program, or due to visa or travel restrictions. Especially you need to ask if the host family can host you for longer. Each person’s situation is different, so make sure to seek permission first.

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH YFU

When you meet up with YFU volunteers and staff and other exchange students, share stories of your experience. Take the opportunity to talk about your exchange. You might be able to help other exchange students who have not experienced the same things as you.

When you began your exchange, you might have had different expectations, or more simply, you thought that when you went abroad you would bring your traditions while also learning about your host country. This experience is not just about learning facts. It is about much more! It is about learning to be open minded, to accept diversity, to confront yourself with new and sometimes challenging experiences, to learn a new language and most importantly, to learn about who you were and who you are now.



While preparing to return, think about how can you explain your host country to your friends and family back home.

Be aware that you might feel a little bit unsettled once you are back home. The same techniques you used to adjust to a new culture will come in handy when you get back to your home country too. After all, if you have a successful experience in a country very different than your own, you will be better prepared to face new experiences in your home country.

You can also use your experience to promote YFU exchange programs and cultural studies. Talk about your experience not only to the friends you made in your host country but also to your friends back home. If you have gotten to know YFU volunteers, let them know about your friends interested in an exchange experience. Sharing stories and experiences can help you to better understand some parts of your experience or to answer questions about what you have done and seen during your exchange.

Your YFU exchange program does not end just because you have returned home. Keep on learning! So even after all the meeting during your exchange you can keep in touch with YFU local office.

Maintaining a connection with YFU is a valuable experience that you can do after your exchange year. It will give you the opportunity to meet volunteers and YFU staff and gain perspectives on the student exchange program.

You can also learn from other students - former and current one - who have had different experiences. They might be able to give answer questions, give advice about something you might experience in the future, or help you to better understand some parts of your experience.

The YFU staff and volunteers will also be able to answer any new questions you have.



READJUSTMENT, CHANGE IN CHARACTER

Your exchange year does not end the moment you arrive back in your home country. Your arrival home, as well as your daily routine, is now filtered through your experience as an exchange student. Sometimes the process of adapting to your natural country is the same as what you experienced at the beginning of your exchange program. **It is a process of readjustment**, that can, at first, be every bit as challenging as it was to embark upon your exchange year in the first place. You might notice that your personality may have changed. You might feel more confident, more curious, more open-minded, but you can also tend to be more critical towards what you use to see as normal.

Your goals may have changed too. You might want to travel more, to see other countries, or have an interest in a career overseas. Your new goals will not necessarily be linked with the desire to travel again, but you might have a clearer idea of what you want to be or do in the future. You may want to promote the culture you have learned, preserve your own cultural identity or do volunteer work related to an important issue you came across during your exchange experience.

Your family and friends may not be prepared for these changes in your personality. Be patient with them and do not be upset if they seem confused or make comments about your new goals. You need to give them time to readjust to you too. From your friends in particular, you can expect contrasting feelings, and sometimes they will think you are acting superior to them. Again, give them time to adjust to the new person you have become.



You should tell friends and family why you feel differently about certain topics or values than you did before. Remember to be as culturally sensitive as you were in your host country. After all, your friends and family did not have the same experience that you did.

“Coming home was an amazing and terrible experience. I was with my friends and family again, but I also had left my new friends and family. My mom was the first to notice my change. I was used to moving my own luggage and navigating an airport, something I could never imagine doing beforehand. My father noticed how I was more considerate of my family when we went out and how I wanted to pay for my own things. He later described me leaving as his baby girl and coming home as a little adult. I was self-confident and realized that I could

making it without my friends and family. I was able to become self-reliable during my time away. My mind set was also changed about college. I always knew I wanted to help people, but was not too serious in my thinking. Upon returning to the states I starting skyping weekly with four other students from Youth for Understanding. We were all trying for the same thing: get back to Japan and work hard to achieve our goals. Mine is to earn a degree in Physiology and Japanese. If I had never went on this trip, I would have never realized my potential. I am now a hard working student. I am able to walk into a crowd and feel confident. Without Youth For Understanding and the tools they have gave me, I would not be the person I am today.”
--Marie from USA (exchange to Japan)

Just as you have changed, so may have your friends or family. Family routines and interactions can be different. These changes may not be major, but they are new and unexpected for you since you were not there when those changes happened. Be interested in what has happened at home while you were abroad. You are not the only one who has experienced new things during this year.

“When I came back from my exchange in Brazil, it took me a lot to readapt. Mainly because I did not have much contact with family and friends, back in Germany. Secondly because I greatly missed my Brazilian friends and boyfriend. Obviously the weather and the food were very different and I was still used to having only few classes since I was attending a public school in Brazil. I found out later that the enormous homesickness or anger for German things was probably a culture shock. For me it was difficult to overcome this feelings. New friends and, after a while, a new German boyfriend helped me reintegrate into society and German culture. What finally solved the culture shock and homesickness was the chance to visit Brazil two years later. This time I was able to enjoy all the things I liked, visiting many people, and also I came to understand that there were things I would never be able to like during the exchange. This time I was just a tourist, visitor for a very limited time. Also I had a different point of view and realized that not everything was a paradise in Brazil as my memories suggested - again I realized that things had not pleased me. So I got to see the two countries in a more balanced way. Back in my ‘normal’ life in Germany, began to integrate what I liked most in the two cultures in my life.”
--Lisa from Germany (exchange to Brazil)

KEEPING UP WITH WHAT YOU LEARNED

After your YFU exchange, you should not put your experience on the shelf to gather dust! This has been such a big experience and change for you that it is important to share it with others. Keep the experience alive by taking language classes, or joining conversational groups to keep up your language skills.

TIPS TO STAY CONNECTED

- Offer to tutor your host country language at your school or in your community.
- Volunteer in your community to share the importance of cultural exchange.
- Make presentations in your school about the country you have been to or about YFU.
- Join civic programs that address some of the new values you have learned.
- Join a newspaper about arts, cultures or politics, etc.

If possible, take classes or continue to read about your host country culture. These courses will help you better remember what you experienced about your host country and learn things that you might have not heard while you were there.

DO YOUR OWN FOLLOW UP

- Read books or watch movies about your host country in the local language, or about what took place while you were there. It is a good way to keep up with your language skills and to learn new information about a region or part of the country you could not visit.
- Watch a movie that you've seen before and see how your language skills have improved since you last watched it. You will be surprised how your communication skills have improved.
- Keep up with the current situation of your host country via news and blogs you can find on the internet. This will make you aware of the changes that are taking place in your host country.

- If your school hosts exchange students, make some connection with them. Ask your school if they have a “buddy” program you can participate in. Student buddies help new students get used to a new school, introduce them at social events and other activities and cope with day-to-day challenges. If not, work with the school to create tools to help foreign students feel more at home in your country. It is a good way to learn other cultures and maybe find the next destination for your future journeys!
- Keep in touch with your host family and friends. Now thanks to Facebook, Twitter and other social media it is really easy to keep in touch with somebody in another part of the world. You can share news and current events that are happening in your country.

TEACHING IS A GREAT WAY TO LEARN!

Sharing your culture is the best way to open your mind towards those you might meet during your stay. Use each new experience as an opportunity to learn more about your host culture and educate yourself about different values. Sharing your experience with other exchange students, friends and family will help you remember all you learned as well as teach them something new about your country and the world.

Keep in mind that not everyone will want to hear every detail of your experience. Your friends will likely be curious about your exchange experience, but do not overwhelm them with too many stories and details. And once in a while it is actually a good idea to also ask your friends about their year.

Ask other exchange students to share their stories with you too. Even if they were exchanging in the same country as you, they might have had a completely different experience than yours. Thanks to sharing experiences and cultures, other exchange students and you can learn even more about the world.



Try to find a way to share your experience within your community. There are plenty of ways to do so: offer to write a column for your school or local newspaper, participate in school events, promote the country you lived in on your Facebook page, volunteer to teach your host country language or...just invite your friends to try some special recipe you learned during your exchange year.

All these activities will help make your friends and community more aware of the cultural diversity of your host country,. Yo may even find someone interested to share their experience with you too!

“I went as an exchange to Sweden in 2007, and of course the one thing I was thinking is that this experience is all about me. What am I going to learn this year, will I be able to speak the language, will I meet and make new friends and how will all this benefit ME! After a while you realise that you are actually an ambassador of your country and people will learn from you whether you try to teach them or not. More importantly your experience goes on even longer long after you have arrived back home. You now become an ambassador for the country you came from, you are the magnifying glass everyone will see that country through and develop their first impressions...”

...When I returned home, one of the first things I did was set up a presentation at my school in the very same hall where I first heard about being an exchange student. I had gained so much from the experience and realised that not sharing about my experience would be a undefinable form of theft – taking all I could and giving nothing back. This was the first of many presentations I did across schools around the city, sometimes I got overwhelming responses and other times people were not so overwhelmed. I managed to expose people to the idea of an intercultural society and experience. This was the best way (at the time of my final year of high school) to give back to my community that has formed to what I am today. Even though my mailbox is not flooded with mails about wanting to know more about YFU I know that those who knew nothing about it now know something, like me, a few months before signing on the dotted line and going on exchange and knowing everything about intercultural exchanges (or at least I like to think that).”

-- Ngoako from South Africa (exchange to Sweden)

BEING A YFU VOLUNTEER OR INTERN

The day-to-day work of YFU depends on the hard work of a large network of volunteers. Volunteering or interning in support of the work of YFU National Organizations around the world helps ensure that other new students will be able to have a life-changing experience like yours!

“Ylva is going to be our 11th host child. People say it is a record, but it does not matter. Every time we have the same pang, this anxiety which overcome us each time a new student arrives. How will she be? Will he belong to our family? Nevertheless, we feel confident. Did we ever fail? No! So, why be worried? Indeed, we have only good memories of our host daughters and sons from ‘the back of beyond!’”
--Annie and Roger - host family from Belgium

Being a YFU volunteer is a great way to take your exchange experience to the next level. You will have an opportunity to give back to YFU while contributing to the meaningful experience of future YFU students and host families. You will be able to share your experience – both the successes and challenges – and give good and helpful advice to new students.

You will be in a great position to help find potential exchange students and host families. Having a firsthand idea of being an exchange student means you are able to give a balanced, direct and personal opinion on exchange programs.

It can be a fun experience to help YFU support new exchange students. Being a YFU VOLUNTEER has many POSITIVE ASPECTS. It helps to:

- Encourage your friends and classmates to take part in an exchange program
- Promote hosting to your own parents and family members
- Introduce hosting and volunteering to other families and friends.

As a student volunteer, you may be able to help with YFU orientations and other events, because you can share your valuable first-hand experience with others. You could help at orientations, organize different YFU events,



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promote exchange and hosting at schools and community events and meet other volunteers. It's a great way to meet new people and have fun in general!



This is a great way to keep the memories of your experience fresh, instead of letting them fade away. Helping YFU will be a constant reminder of the importance of sharing cultures.

In various areas of the YFU world, there are opportunities to volunteer as a program intern. You can be an area representative or coordinator helping new students and host families, offering guidance and support. You can assist the administrative or logistical work of YFU and help the new generation of students to understand how YFU works. And you can work directly to support students that are about to start a new exchange program.



Once you return home, contact your home country YFU office to inquire.

“Have you ever worked with people from different countries and cultures? I can say I have! I am working with people from USA, Sweden, Uruguay, Germany and Italy! (I can say ‘thank you’ in Swedish, Portuguese, and Italian!) As the only Asian intern, it was hard for me to understand their English accents and cultures at the beginning. But the more time I spent with them, the more I found myself able to understand all their accents. Working as an intern in YFU means working in a reduced size world!

I have already gained skills in planning youth leadership camp in Korea, but it is the first time that I am preparing international meetings. From the site-visit to hotels, which will hold our meeting, to checking the arrival and departure time of each participant, there are countless tasks to do in order to prepare meetings. I am knocked out at the end of my work day, but I found out that I do enjoy it. I love managing and preparing events. So, thanks to this opportunity at YFU I decide to be an event planner after my graduation. Thanks this wonderful internship I found my career path, which fits with my personality.”
--Nayoung from South Korea (exchange to USA)

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