

Riverside Secondary

Hosting A Foreign Student

Tips and Guidelines

Thinking of Hosting a Foreign Exchange Student?

Be sure to keep these thoughts in mind when choosing and hosting your exchange student:

Pick a student with similar interests to your own. Don't pick a student who is heavy into outdoor sports, thinking your bookworm family will change its ways...you won't and both of you will be unhappy in the end. Read the student letters and bios VERY carefully and look for clues of immaturity, dominance, chauvenism and possible (more noticeable and problematic) character flaws too. If there is something you absolutely don't want to deal with then pick another student.

When they first arrive, don't have a huge party. Your student will be exhausted. Some take many travel days to get here, depending on where they are coming from. Plus, they have to deal with time changes, cultural changes and just the change of being in a new place with absolute strangers and no familiar family in sight! Integrate them slowly. When you first meet them, ask them if they are hungry, take care of those needs, then go home and let them sleep. Let them take a few days to get adjusted. There will be time for a party next weekend (or whenever), as well as showing them around. Don't give them too much to process the first few days. Have basic toiletries on hand. Many don't travel with much stuff and may be too embarrassed initially to say they need something. We always have a basket of toiletries and toothbrushes in our guest bathroom for all guests. Let them know they can help themselves. No need for them to ask!

Do show them where you keep basic stuff. Go ahead and give them a quick tour around the house after they arrive, just to show them the basics. Show them where the snacks are and where to put their dirty laundry. Tell them when mealtimes are. Later, let them empty the dishwasher and the trashcan...what better way to learn where everything goes? Make sure you tell them they are not a guest but part of the family, and then treat them accordingly.

Realize you may get some cultural resistance. Many of these kids come from cultures where moms do all the housework or dads say what goes. Let them know how you do things here. Remind them they are here on an exchange, and that to be a part of your family, they will do things the way you do things. Don't listen to the excuse that I can't make my bed because that is lady's work...uhh uhhh...not here it ain't!

Your water, electric and whatever bill will be higher. Most teenagers LOVE to shower. Our boy takes two or three long showers a day. Water in Florida is expensive. Just be sure to budget for these extra expenses or be prepared to teach them about conservation.

Your food bill will be higher. Teenagers eat....a lot. I also had to shop more often and buy snacks and things like that...teenagers like to eat pizzas and snack stuff rather than regular meals, although we do try to sit down as a family at least a few days a week and required this of our student too.

Figure out ahead of time how you will deal with situations and money. We decided beforehand, that whatever we spent money on with our kids, we spent it on our student too. If we went out to eat, to an amusement park, shopped for Christmas gifts, our student was treated as one of our children. For extra expenses, such as when he goes out with his friends on his own (which is almost all the time...kids love to go out to eat and spend money) and clothing and other knick knacks he may want to buy, those were on his own dime, and he understood that ahead of time.

Have a rules talk. Within days of our student arriving, we sat down with him, in fact, we wrote it all down in very plain English, what was expected of him. He ended up posting it on his bulletin board in his room. It listed his curfews (schoolnights and weekends), no drinking, driving, drugs and that kind of thing and what his chores and responsibilities would be. Our student cleans his bathroom every other week (he rotates that with our kids) and gets \$20 for mowing our huge lawn. Otherwise, we ask him to keep his room clean and pick up around the house when he sees something out of place. Of course, we constantly have to remind him of many of these things, which I believe are just part of normal teenage behavior.

Have them realize there will be consequences when (not if) they screw up. You are standing in for the student's parents. Our student's mom actually told him if he screws up, he will be on the first plane back home. They have to learn responsibility. If they come in late from curfew, then take something away from them, whether it's internet, TV or going out (a big one for them). Most teenagers LOVE to sleep in and hey, if they miss their ride to school, let them sweat it out and figure it out themselves. Our student had to go flying through our subdivision on my son's little scooter one morning, trying to catch his last chance for a ride. He made it, but next time, he got up when his alarm rang. These kids have to learn to be adults, and if you baby them, make their school lunch, make their bed for them or wake them up in the morning, they will never learn (remember this with your own kids too). We also had the "sex talk"...I wanted him to make sure I knew what the deal was and if there was any hanky panky that gets him or a girl in trouble, he was going to be on the first plane home, no questions asked.

Schedule some family activities. I made sure to schedule some events for our family, including our student. Give them a head's up well ahead of time to make sure they understand they will be attending the event. Many students think it is almost all fun and games when they come here. Ours doesn't want to do anything without his friends, so we sometimes have to rein him in and remind him that he is here on an exchange and not on a party bus. Let them know their world revolves around your family and not them.

Have a set-up for your student's privacy. Kids at this age should have some sort of privacy. Don't dig through their stuff and if you can, give them a room they can call their own. This is important. Our

student knows that his room is his and his alone and that I don't even go in there other than to peek in to make sure it is somewhat in order and all the four walls are still standing.

Decide what you want to do about the cellphone situation. It seems like every teenager has a cellphone these days. Our student says kids text message all day long, even when they are standing right next to each other. We couldn't add our student to our cellphone plan, because we didn't want to incur any more time in our contract due to our upcoming move. Plus, we would've had to uptick our minutes and add text messaging, which we don't have. So, our student had his mom send his phone from home, and we set it up as a prepaid phone. He ended up going through his minutes like water, especially with all the incoming text messages he had to pay for too, so he eventually started leaving it at home when he went to school...a good and smart decision if you ask me in the first place. He has learned to be thrifty and to delay gratification with the thing.

No TV or computer/internet in the teen's room. When we went over the rules, we set down the internet rules as well. If you don't want to trust them and are a little paranoid, you can always get one of those software monitoring programs on your computer and set them up with their own user id (not as administrator). Keep the computer and TV in the common areas of your house (this is a must for your kids too). You want them to know you are monitoring what they are doing, and that you are keeping track of the time they spend online. I think ours learned the wonders of My Space over here, although I think he was already a messaging wizard before he came here. I have heard it can be a real problem keeping them off the internet for hours, as many want that contact with home (and their friends), and this behavior is discouraged in order for this exchange to work as it should.

Insist that they call their parents and family at least every other week. This frequency seems to work out best. Once a week is too often and longer than two weeks wrecks havoc on the poor parents. We have lowcost long distance/international phone service and our host family was also able to find a deal at two cents a minute. You can't beat that! Check Phonedog to find a lowcost long distance provider in your area.

Query them about their likes and dislikes, and try to make them feel at home. Most will get homesick at some point. Ours had no problem at the beginning, it is at the end of his stay that he is starting to feel down and apprehensive about going back. Give them a chance to tell you their wants and needs. Buy snacks and toiletries and things for around the house they might need. We made up a basket of goodies and gadgets, such as a pocketknife, pen flashlight, dictionary, Post It Notes, a popular novel and office and desk items our student might have needed for school. We included a nice note and put this on his desk in his room before his arrival. The kids also made a welcome home sign for his bedroom door. Before I go to the grocery store or wherever, I do let him know I am going beforehand and leave my shopping list where he can add things to it.

Encourage your student to answer the home phone. Ours used to run the other way when it rang. I finally had to tell him to answer it. Now that he has his confidence up, he has no problem answering it. Try to get them in situations where they can get their confidence going in the right direction. You can start with a non-threatening thing such as the phone..it's not face-to-face contact, and if they totally

screw up, they can still run and find you and give you the phone. The more they do something, the better they'll get at it and the more they'll get out of the exchange experience.

Local Do's and Don'ts, Street Smarts, Urban Survival, Rules and Guidelines. If you're in a big city and the young person you're hosting comes from a smaller town, take a little time to teach her or him the basics of street smarts and urban survival. Our neighbors hosted an exchange student and were very happy to have him as a guest member of their family. One afternoon on the way home from school he was let out of the bus on the main drag nearest their house and tried to cross the street from in FRONT of the bus. He was hit and killed on the spot. This happened in front of the family's twelve-year-old son, who was riding the bus with him. It was heartbreaking. And more so because no kid who lives around here would even think of walking across the road in front of a bus; they would all walk to the back of the bus where they could see oncoming traffic or walk the 50 or 60 feet from the bus to a crosswalk. In some parts of the world jaywalking is normal behavior. So...think of all the hazards a kid could encounter and give a clue.

Knowledge of Canadian and B.C. Laws: Must be of legal drinking age in order to enter a bar or nightclub in B.C.: nineteen years old. All school and district rules apply to the host and foreign student.

In Case of an Emergency: Assure that the student has appropriate contact information and local telephone access. Please make them aware of area codes and long distance numbers.

Car pooling and support from others in the group! Car-pooling is encouraged. The roster is available for contact purposes.

Be Punctual: At school and at home. Hopefully you aren't the one's holding up the group.