



# Host Family Handbook

A Guide to Journeying with Your International Student



**prayer:**

“Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long” (Psalm 25:4–5, NIV).

**promise:**

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you” (Psalm 32:8).

# **Host Family Handbook**

A Guide to Journeying with Your International Student

Dear Host Family,

Thank you for choosing to host an international student! Your student's journey toward the host country and culture has already begun, and the journey will continue when your student arrives. We at the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) believe that this experience is just a stepping-stone toward God's greater purposes for his or her life. You will have a front-row seat in seeing those purposes unfold as you journey with your student. Although you will not be leaving home, you too will begin a journey toward your student's country and culture. You can expect to be transformed as you embark on this great adventure of hosting someone from another country and culture!

This handbook was developed for you by ACSI. It will help you prepare for your student's arrival, will address issues that may arise during his or her stay with you, and will give you some practical tips for the whole journey from beginning to end. We have arranged the booklet into three sections:

1. Preparing for Your Student's Arrival
2. Hosting Your Student
3. Sending Your Student Home

Refer any questions that you may have to your international student program (ISP) coordinator at the host school.

Blessings on your journey.

Laura Chevalier

Host Family Handbook: A Guide to Journeying with Your International Student

Association of Christian Schools International

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## **Acknowledgments**

Many thanks to Amicus International Student Exchange, a division of Young Life, for allowing ACSI to review its materials in developing this handbook. Thank you for sharing the wealth of your experience and resources. May God return the blessing to you!

ACSI would also like to acknowledge the Rotary Youth Exchange, whose resources we also reviewed in creating this document.

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# 1 Preparing for Your Student's Arrival

Even before your student arrives, there are many things that you can do to prepare. Read through the following information and suggestions carefully. Refer back to this section throughout the time leading up to your student's arrival.

## A. Knowing Who Is Involved

First, it is important to know the people you will be working with in this program. The people and groups described below will be your partners while you host an international student.

**Your student** will be an international student between the ages of 11 and 18. Your student may or may not be a believer and may or may not come from a Christian family. In order to study abroad as an international student, your student will have been thoroughly screened in a variety of areas, including academic ability, language ability, health, interests, character, community involvement, and motivation for participating. Most students are adequately conversational in English.

**The host school** is a private Christian school. Christian schools differ in size, course offerings, facilities, and activities; however, Christian values are prominent in all these schools. Students will be expected to abide by the school rules and participate in activities and programs that are based on these values. Host families will be expected to be involved in the life of the host school.

**Your international student program (ISP) coordinator** will be your main link to the host school. Your ISP coordinator will be closely connected to the host school either as a teacher, a parent, or a volunteer. He or she will provide you with orientation to the ISP before your student arrives, with support and supervision throughout your hosting time, and with preparation for your student's departure. Refer any ISP questions to your ISP coordinator.

**You as a host family** will be your student's family away from home. You will house your student, provide his or her meals and transportation, encourage his or her spiritual growth toward Christ, and serve as your student's main support while he or she is living in your home. Your student will be carefully screened and matched to your family using criteria that include interests, pace of life, ages and genders of

children in the family, and so on. If you are a dorm parent, your responsibilities may be slightly different from those of a host family because your school may help with providing meals and transportation. However, it will still be your job to provide the main support and care for your students throughout their stay.

## B. Expectations

Although it is impossible to predict everything that will happen while you host an international student, we can give you an idea what to expect. Since expectations often determine our reactions to events and circumstances, we hope that you will take the time to read through this section carefully.

**The purpose and length of your student's stay** in many ways will determine what you expect to happen. It is important that you think about your purpose in hosting a student. Hosting a student for the wrong reasons (such as having a built-in babysitter or as a way to improve relationship issues) not only will be detrimental for your student but will also cause you to have unrealistic expectations that will not be met.

In general, the main purpose of an international student program (ISP) is to promote cross-cultural learning among students, teachers, schools, and communities. If your desire is to learn and grow and provide a safe, secure home for a student for about a 6-month (one academic semester) or a 10-month period (an academic year), then your expectations of participating in the ISP are realistic, and they most likely will be met. Host families who host a student who will be staying for the entire academic year are usually asked to commit to host for the full academic year. (Your student may choose to continue attending the host school for subsequent years, and you may be asked to continue hosting him or her, but you are under no obligation to do so.)

**Your relationship with your student** will be an important part of your student's experience. It may be difficult at first to get to know your student because of cultural differences; however, if you are prepared to make the effort, your relationship with your student will be a highlight of his or her time abroad and also be a source of joy to you. This relationship will enrich both your student's and your family's lives. Your student will observe you as you live your faith, and will naturally be drawn into closer relationship with God.

Make sure to begin communicating with your international student before his or her arrival. Your ISP coordinator will give you your student's contact information.

**Your family life** will change once you welcome an international student into your home, so expect to make some adjustments. Your student will be used to a different kind of family life simply because he or she has lived in another family and culture. For example, some international students studying in North America may not be as accustomed to contributing to the family by performing household tasks such as cleaning or doing laundry, while some North American students studying in other countries may not be used to having “house help.” Cultural background will also determine whether your student is used to more formal or informal relationships with his or her parents. North American parents tend to have more informal relationships with their children, while most Asian, Latin American, and African cultures tend to have more formal parent-child relations. Also, your international student may have had less or more freedom than you give your own children.

Expect a period of adjustment in which you learn about your student and your student learns about you. Be patient with your student as he or she learns about your family's expectations and ways of living together. Be willing to answer questions and offer clarification. Take time to ask your own questions and find out your student's perspective as well.

Despite their differences, families in all cultures do have some things in common, so expect that you will have fun times and difficult times—just as you would without this new addition to your family. Expect that sometimes you will be more connected with your student than at other times and that each season of the year may bring new family dynamics. For instance, your student may seem to be adjusting well to your family, but the busyness and newness of a holiday season may cause him or her to withdraw for a while. So differences will abound, but many things will be the same.

**School life** for you and your student will also be different, especially if your student will be attending a host school in which instruction is not in his or her first language. If this is the case, expect that your student will probably take longer to complete homework. The courses and rules that are familiar to you and your children may not make sense to your student. For instance, your student may have had little freedom in choosing classes and may be used to attending lectures in which students are not supposed to speak or ask questions. The more different the student's host school is from schools in his or her home country, the more adjustments will be necessary. It is important to be available to answer questions and offer counsel and advice. Expect that it may be hard at first for your student to understand how to function in this

new educational system and that you may not know just how to help. But also expect that eventually you and your student will adjust and learn to adapt.

**Communication** with your student may be both a challenge and a great opportunity for growth. Although your student will know how to communicate in the necessary languages well enough to get by, he or she may never have had to use a nonnative language so frequently. This may also be the first time that you have had to answer questions about your language and explain why things are phrased a certain way. In addition, forms of nonverbal communication that you and your student use—such as hand gestures and facial expressions—may be different and thus hard to understand at first. Be patient with yourself and with your student. Try not to raise your voice or talk down to him or her; be willing to repeat what you have said, slow down your pace, and answer clarifying questions. During the first few days and weeks, it is important to allow your student to gain confidence in speaking, so keep corrections to a minimum. However, over time, offer more correction and expect that your student will seek out your native expertise in English and will ask for help.

Depending on your student's situation, he or she may have to function in your country's language most of the time. Even if your student has taken extensive classes in this language, using it so often may be stressful at first. Allow your student time to adjust. Encourage your student not to be discouraged if people ask him or her to repeat a word or a phrase. Help your student to prepare both to be misunderstood and to misunderstand others. Even if most of your student's communication will be in his or her native language, there still may be areas to adjust in communicating. Expect possible differences and take time to listen to your student and help him or her understand them. A sense of humor will go a long way in alleviating the frustration associated with communicating in a new way.

Some schools have formal classes to help students improve in language ability. Other schools require that students seek outside help. Your student and his or her parents will be expected to cover expenses for extra language tutoring or for classes that are not included in the host school's program.

**Learning opportunities and adventures** will abound for your family and your student during your hosting experience. Even though you will not travel to a new land, the presence of your student in your home will cause you to see and hear things that you may have never seen or heard before. Your student

may introduce you to activities that you did not even know existed. You will also be challenged to think about things in new ways. Your perspective will be expanded. All these experiences will not only help you appreciate your student's culture but will also help you understand the uniqueness and richness of your own culture. We hope that all these new experiences will be positive, but some may be hard and challenging. The school and the ISP coordinator will do everything they can to support you in your hosting experience, but it will be up to you and your family to shape how learning happens.

**Character development** will be a natural result of your family's experience as all of you push yourselves to think in unfamiliar ways. However, it is a good idea to have some goals in mind for your hosting time. What are some family values and personal character qualities that you would like to develop? Patience? Flexibility? Openness? In what areas would you like your family to grow? Do you want to be more understanding? Do you want to be more helpful to each other? If you let it, this experience will have a significant influence in shaping you and your family more into the people that God wants you to be, and you will have the opportunity to encourage and influence your student's character development.

**Gratitude** is one character quality that we hope you and your family develop as you host your student. Also work on teaching your student gratitude by serving as real-life examples of people motivated by a grateful heart rather than a sense of entitlement. As you model this attitude in your own life, it is reasonable to expect that your student will take note and be challenged to do the same.

## C. Culture

Culture is the entire way of life of a group of people. People who belong to a specific cultural group have shared assumptions, values, beliefs, and behaviors. As you move toward your student's culture, you will encounter a new way of life that includes all the items mentioned above. For instance, social rules may be different—what is viewed as inappropriate behavior in your own culture may be viewed as acceptable behavior in your student's culture. These differences will probably make you feel uncomfortable at times and excited at other times. You will be exposed to a different way of living and of looking at the world, and you will have to choose how you will react. You may not always understand why your student does things differently from the way that students in your own culture do things, but it is important that you desire to learn. As you begin your journey with your student, it will be important for you to learn more about your

student's culture, about your own culture, and about the adjustment process that you and your student will go through as you host your student. (See the appendix for a list of resources about adapting to a new culture.)

**Knowing your student's culture** is a vital step in your adaptation to your student and in your student's adaptation to your culture. However, you do not have to wait until your student arrives to begin learning about his or her home. You should start corresponding with your student once you have his or her contact information. You can begin researching your student's country anytime by reading books, searching the Internet, and talking to people who have traveled to or lived in that country. (Watching movies from your student's culture will help; however, be aware that they sometimes perpetuate stereotypes.) Find out about the geography, pastimes, holidays, and values of people in the country.

Although you can do much to educate yourself about your student's culture before the student arrives, remember that he or she is still likely to act and react in ways that you do not expect. Individual people in a given culture can vary widely in their values and ways of life, so do not expect your student to behave exactly like other members of his or her culture. But *if you become a culture learner before your student arrives, it will be easier to continue the process once he or she is living with you.*

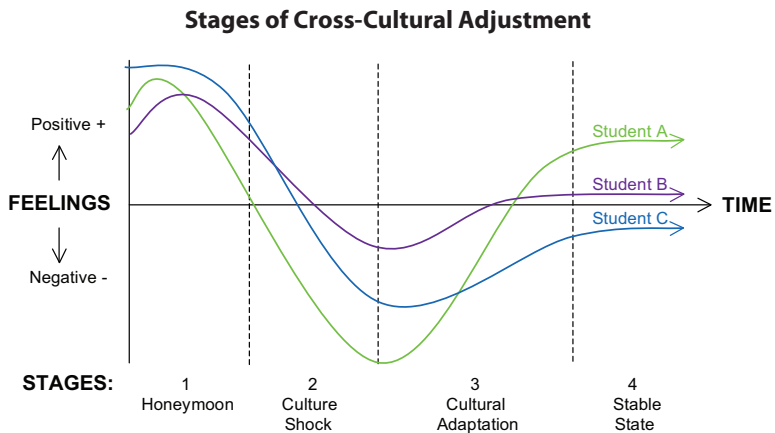
**Knowing your own culture** may not seem as important to you as knowing about your student's culture. However, being aware of who you are and where you come from is equally important in a cross-cultural situation. Have you ever thought about the way of life of people in your own country and region? Most people do not consciously think about these things until they encounter another culture, and it can be quite shocking when they encounter people who are culturally different and discover that the rest of the world does not necessarily operate the way they do. You can get a head start on knowing your own culture better before your student arrives by beginning to take note of how things operate at home. How do you greet one another? How do you communicate emotions? What types of transportation do you use? What kinds of houses do people live in? What values are important in your culture? The list could go on and on. It may be helpful to think about your home culture in terms of categories such as government, geography, social life, economics, transportation, communication, and manners.

Not only will this awareness help you in your adjustment to hosting an international student, but it will also help you answer questions that your

student will have about your home. Your student will want and need you to explain how things work in your culture. Becoming an observer of your home culture before your student arrives will enable you to answer questions better.

If your student is attending an international host school in your country, it is likely that the school will have a culture all its own. The school curriculum and instruction will mostly likely be Western, but your student's classmates will come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, probably including students from your culture. Therefore, as you think about your culture, also think about the culture of the school your student will attend, since your student will likely have questions about his or her international classmates as well.

**The adjustment process** that you and your student will go through during his or her stay with you and your family does not have to surprise you. Most people progress through stages in their adjustment to a new culture. However, the degree to which each person experiences positive and negative emotions can vary. Typically the process can be broken down into four stages, as illustrated by the following diagram.



- **Stage 1, Honeymoon.** Your student will be excited about traveling to your country, and he or she will enjoy experiencing new people and places. In the same way, you will probably be very eager to welcome your student and to find out more about this new person in your home.
- **Stage 2, Culture Shock.** Your student will feel the stress of living in a new culture, so his or her feelings may be more negative. You too may begin to wonder what happened to your warm feelings and may also begin to notice

tension between you and the student. You might start to wonder what happened to the “sweet student” you first welcomed.

- **Stage 3, Cultural Adaptation.** Fortunately, these negative feelings will begin to diminish in stage 3, and your student will begin to adjust to your culture and function in the new environment. Again, your adjustment will probably mirror your student's—you will begin to be more at ease having a culturally different person in your family. You will begin to experience more depth in your relationship and will begin to understand how you can all live together.
- **Stage 4, Stable State.** Finally your student will learn how to live in your culture; his or her feelings will become stable and more predictable, and life will feel more even and normal for everyone in the family.

As you can see from the diagram, students will experience different degrees of positive and negative emotions and will adapt at different paces—and so will host families. Students who do not accept the differences in their host culture may find that even during their Stable State, their feelings are not as positive as those of others (see Student C in the diagram). The feelings of host families who do not accept their students' differences also will not be as positive. Learning about the process of cross-cultural adjustment, learning about your student's culture, and becoming more aware of your own culture before your student arrives will minimize the negative feelings that you experience during the adjustment process—and will go a long way in helping your student adjust as well. Adjustment is a process, so be patient with your student and with yourself and keep a positive attitude. Cross-cultural interaction can be exhausting, so be sure to plan times of rest and refreshment for all of you. (See the resources in the appendix for more information about the adjustment process.)

**Homesickness** is a normal part of the experience of being away from one's family and home for an extended period. Do not be surprised if your student experiences it, especially when he or she is frustrated with unfamiliar circumstances. (Homesickness will probably be most acute during the Culture Shock stage of your student's adjustment.) The best thing that you can do to help your student handle homesickness is to listen. Allow your student to express what he or she is feeling. Ask your student to teach your family some phrases in his or her language or share about his or her home and family. If your student misses food from home, help your student cook a traditional dish to share with your family. You can also help your student get involved in family and school life, but be sure not to overwhelm him or her with activity. These are all healthy ways to deal with homesickness.

Encourage your student not to spend a lot of time making telephone calls or e-mailing people back home. While it is important for your student to stay in touch with family and friends, doing so is not a cure for homesickness. Help your student understand that he or she must take enough time to get used to the host country and host family; if your student does not take time, he or she will not adjust. That is why it is best to discourage visits from family and friends during the beginning of the student's stay—the student needs time to begin engaging in family and school activities and to begin functioning well.

## D. Medical Issues

Before your student arrives, it is important for you to be aware of medical issues, including yearly medical examinations, up-to-date immunizations, and insurance coverage. Please review this section carefully as you prepare for your student's arrival.

**Yearly medical examinations** are recommended for all international students. This is a standard practice for most students in educational settings. Check with the school to find out if your student will have the exam completed before he or she arrives or if you will need to help arrange it once he or she arrives. If the student wants to participate in sports at the school, it is especially important to find out the yearly medical exam policies.

A copy of your student's medical examination report should be provided to you so you will have a good understanding of your student's medical health and needs. First-year students should also complete a full medical history. Returning students should inform the ISP of any changes in their medical history. Host families should receive copies of all medical forms, including a release of medical records and liability signed by the student and his or her parents.

**Immunizations** are the responsibility of your student and his or her parents. Different countries have different required immunizations, so students and their parents are encouraged to check the Center for Disease Control's website for a list of required and recommended immunizations for the host country. They should consult with their primary care physician or a travel clinic to ensure that the student's immunizations are up-to-date.

In some cases, students may need to get additional immunizations once they arrive in the host country, and host parents will need to help them arrange this. Immunizations are not covered by most international student insurance plans, so students and their parents will need to be prepared to pay for them.

**Insurance** enrollment before leaving his or her home country is necessary for your student. Check with the ISP coordinator to find out if the school automatically provides insurance to international students in its fees or if the school recommends insurance companies whose plans the students enroll in independently. The school or your student should give you all necessary information about this coverage, the policies and procedures associated with it, and the people to contact so that you can assist your student as issues arise. This insurance should include health, medical, and accident coverage for injury and illness; death benefits (including repatriation of remains); disability and dismemberment benefits; emergency medical evacuation; emergency visitation expenses; 24-hour emergency assistance services; and liability. Typically this type of insurance is not for preventative health care. Students should not plan on having major medical, dental, or eye examinations while living in the host country. The coverage should be active from the time of your student's departure from the home country until his or her return. Your student should carry his or her insurance card at all times.

## E. Financial Issues

As you anticipate hosting an international student, it is good to be aware of financial issues that may arise. You also need to be aware of the responsibilities of the host family, of the student, and of the student's family. These issues can be uncomfortable to discuss, but it is better to be open and honest about expectations from the beginning.

**Your responsibilities** as a host family include providing for the student's housing, meals (usually all three each day), and reasonable transportation. Your family will not be expected to pay for day-to-day items like toiletries or clothes, your student's recreational activities with friends, or extra activities like trips or special events. In addition, extra school expenses that arise, such as fees for sports, music, or yearbooks, should be covered by the student and the student's family.

As host parents, you will need to help your student spend and budget money once he or she arrives. It will also be good to sit down with your student once he or she arrives and talk through financial expectations, such as who will pay when you go out to eat as a family or when the student goes out with friends and what types of items you will provide in the home. (It is usually best for host families to pay for students when the family goes out to eat together. Otherwise the student does not feel like he or she is part of the family. When a student goes out to eat with his or her friends, it is more appropriate to expect them

to pay themselves.) Although it may be a little awkward and uncomfortable to have this discussion, it is important for everyone involved to understand how you will deal with financial issues.

Depending on the host school's policy, your student or the school may or may not provide you with some assistance to cover some of the additional expenses involved in hosting. Even if you do receive some compensation for hosting, such compensation is not meant to cover all expenses that will arise in hosting your international student but simply to ease some of the financial burden. You should expect that hosting an international student will incur some additional expenses for your family.

**Your student's responsibilities** include all school tuition and fees, personal spending money, additional school expenses, and emergency funds. The student and his or her parents should have discussed these issues before the student left home. They should also have made a budget together.

Make sure that you as host parents are aware of how your student and his or her parents plan on handling spending money. For instance, will the student use a credit card, a debit card, or a prepaid debit card? Will his or her parents transfer money to your bank account to give to the student or ask that you help the student open his or her own bank account? Also check with the school to see if they have a policy regarding how spending money should be handled. Some schools even require international students to place extra funds on their school accounts in case extra school expenses come up.

## F. International Travel

Your student and his or her parents will be expected to book and to cover all costs for a round-trip international airline ticket. When your student enters the host country, he or she will be issued immigration documents. (For students entering the United States, these documents include the Arrival-Departure Record Form I-94.) Remind your student to keep these documents with his or her passport throughout the student's stay, because they will contain vital immigration information. Your student will most likely enter the host country on a student visa. (For students entering the United States, this is usually an F-1 student visa.) This nonimmigrant visa is granted by the host country's consulate or embassy in your student's home country. The primary purpose of this visa is educational. Depending on the host country's laws, the visa can be granted to a student for the duration of his or her studies or for one year only.

Your student should be advised to travel with your contact information, his or her insurance card, and a phone card in case he or she experiences any travel delays. Before your student leaves the home country, he or she should receive all pertinent contact information from the ISP coordinator. This information should be given to you as well. Once you and your student receive contact information, you should begin communicating with each other.

## **G. Host Family Orientation**

Before your student arrives, your ISP coordinator should arrange for an orientation for you and other families hosting an international student. You should review ISP rules and conditions, talk about what to expect in hosting a student, and go over topics such as what to do when your student becomes ill or has an emergency. The orientation is a good opportunity for you to ask your ISP coordinator questions and to meet other families who will be hosting students. Be sure to attend this orientation.

## **H. Preparing Your Home**

The idea of opening your home for an extended time to a student from another culture may cause you to feel excited, unsure, or even a bit scared. Actually, you may be experiencing all these emotions at one level or another. All these feelings are normal, especially if this will be your first time hosting an international student. Serving as a host family will bring change to your life and will give you and your student an unforgettable experience.

One thing that will bring change will be the designation of a space in your home for your student. Do you have a spare room that you can give your student, or will the student share a room with one of your own children of the same gender? Your student should have his or her own bed and a place to study. Discuss as a family where the best place for your student will be and make any necessary changes before he or she arrives. Prepare your student's room with special touches specific to your family, but be sure to leave space for the student's own things from home.



## 2 Hosting Your Student

There are many things to keep in mind as you host your student. In the paragraphs that follow, we try to cover the topics you may have questions about. Please spend time reviewing this information before your student arrives. Also refer to this section throughout your time of hosting, especially when questions arise.

### A. Arrival

By the time your student finally lands in the host country, many people, including you, will have been preparing for his or her arrival. Several things will take place when your student arrives, including welcoming your student and in-country orientation for him or her.

**Welcoming your student** when he or she first arrives is a good way to start things off. One way to do this is to meet your student at the airport. However, if for some reason you are not able to meet your student at the airport, let your ISP coordinator know and he or she will arrange for someone from the school to meet the student and transport him or her to your house or a school dormitory. A few weeks before your student's arrival, your ISP coordinator should tell you when your student will be arriving; you can discuss the logistics of welcoming your student at that time.

Be sure to welcome your student warmly. This can be done in small, simple ways, such as making a sign to display at the airport or to put in the student's room. When you get to your house or dormitory, show your student where he or she will stay. Give your student time to recover from jet lag and to get oriented to the new environment. Choose a few things to do to welcome your student, but try not to overwhelm him or her with lots of activity in the first few days. You may wish to take your student to see sights in your town, but pace yourself; you will have the whole school year to show him or her around. Keep in mind that your student may be tired from traveling.

**In-country orientation** should be provided for your student within the first few days of his or her arrival. Your ISP coordinator should let you know the details for this orientation, including when and where your student needs to report. Topics covered should include ISP rules and conditions, host country culture, host school information, living with a host family, cross-cultural

adjustment, and language issues.

## B. ISP Rules and Conditions

The school's ISP will have certain rules and conditions that your student and his or her parents will need to be aware of and agree to follow throughout the student's time in the host country. These rules usually cover categories such as the ISP requirements, purpose, and stipulations; laws of the host country; rules of the host family or dormitory family and host school; insurance coverage and high-risk behavior; finances; and travel. As host parents, you should be aware of these rules and conditions as well since you will be expected to help your student follow them and work through any problems as they arise. Ask your ISP coordinator for a copy of these rules and conditions and read them over. Keep them handy to review with your student during his or her stay in your home.

## C. Family Life

As mentioned before, welcoming a new person into your family will cause your family life to be different from what you are used to. You will notice not only cultural differences but personal differences as well. This will be a rewarding, although sometimes challenging, experience. Now that your student has arrived, it is time for you to start helping him or her get involved.

**Your family involvement** is extremely important for your student as he or she adjusts to a new environment. Help your student by inviting him or her to participate in your family outings, church life, and recreational activities. Spend time talking with your student and showing him or her how to perform household tasks such as doing the dishes or laundry. Be sure to go over any family rules that you may have. In the first few days, make time to sit down with your student to talk about your expectations and to allow him or her to ask any questions.

**Relationships** will be a significant source of joy and also of frustration as your family adjusts to hosting an international student and as the student adjusts to you. Getting used to new personalities and new family dynamics may take some time. For instance, your international student may now be the oldest child in your household, while at home he or she was the youngest. Think about the interesting reactions and feelings that your student may have to this new situation—and also those of your own child who used to be the oldest in your household. You may be hosting your student in a dormitory setting along with several other students from around the world. The new dynamics involved in

this scenario may feel very strange to your student. Remember that, although you are all attempting to live as a family, the relationship you have with your international student will be different from your relationship with your own children, since your student already has his or her own parents.

Soon after your student's arrival, you should discuss with your student what each person feels comfortable being called. If your student's given name is difficult for you to pronounce, your student may prefer to be called by a nickname, or he or she may ask that you continue trying the harder name. You as host parents may prefer that your student calls you *Mom* and *Dad*, rather than your given names. Or you may feel better about your student calling you a nickname. Be aware that your student may not want to call you *Mom* and *Dad*—your student may wish to reserve those names for his or her own parents. Please do not pressure your student to use a particular name. Also, your own children may have an opinion too, so be sensitive to their feelings as well.

Your relationship with your international student will develop over time, so do not feel pressure to get to know him or her all at once. Take time to build trust and spend time together, and the intimacy and connection you feel with your student will grow.

**Cell phones** are a topic that is important for you to discuss with your student. Some host families like their students to have phones because they enable families to coordinate rides, check in, and stay connected better. While student phones are convenient for host families, they can be a large expense for international students. Therefore, make sure to communicate with your student and his or her parents as early as possible about whether you would like the student to have a cell phone and who will pay for it and for the usage charges.

Keep in mind that your student and his or her parents are probably used to different ways of purchasing cell phones and paying for usage. They may not be familiar with the typical system in the United States, where many companies require a two-year commitment and people in the same household can be on the same plan. If you or your student and his or her parents want the student to have a phone, make sure you discuss whether or not the student will have his or her own plan, buy a prepaid phone and add minutes to it, or be on the family plan. Also discuss how payment will be worked out, particularly if the student does not end up returning to your home for a second year. Make sure to really talk this through with your student and his or her parents before you or the student purchase or sign up for anything. If the convenience of your student

having a cell phone is really important to you but your student and his or her parents are unable to afford the expense, you may choose to bear the expense yourself. Otherwise, you'll need to work with your student to figure out other communication means and methods that fit into both your budgets.

It is also important to discuss with your student your expectations regarding cell phone usage. Is he or she allowed to use the phone only at certain times or places? Clearly lay out your thoughts before you or your student make a big purchase.

**Computer usage** by your student is an area that may create some difficulties, which may vary depending on whether your student brings his or her own computer or uses your family's computer. If your student is sharing your family's computer, remind him or her to be considerate of other family members' computer usage needs. If your student is using his or her own computer, it may be more difficult for your student to understand why you might still regulate the amount of time he or she can spend on the computer. Some students may be used to more freedom or may assume that since they are away from home, they should have more access to the Internet to stay in touch with friends and family.

Your student should have been told that he or she must observe your family rules regarding computer usage and make sure that the amount of time spent on the computer does not interfere with building relationships with you and your family. However, as you establish your family computer usage rules, keep in mind that international students need to use the computer in ways that your own children do not. They need the computer not only for educational purposes but also to stay in touch with family and friends back home and stay connected to their own culture through various websites. If you're not sure what rules you should set or accommodations you should make, ask your ISP coordinator for recommendations about healthy computer usage for international students.

**Meals** may be one of the biggest issues that host families deal with in hosting international students. Most schools have a policy that host families are to provide international students with three meals a day, so these meals can include packing a lunch or providing for school lunches and including the student when the family eats a regular meal out. Sometimes it gets a little sticky to know who pays for what when the family goes out together, but it is good to pay for your international student to make him or her feel

welcome. If your student decides to go out with friends without you and your family, you typically can expect them to pay for themselves and not ask you for money for the meal.

In addition to who pays for meals, another possible source of frustration is the type of food served. You'll need to strike a balance between catering to your international student's tastes and wants (particularly when it comes to his or her own cultural food) and maintaining your own family's eating habits. Be willing to purchase some new and different things, but also encourage your international student to try the things that you buy that may be new and different to him or her. Generally it is a good idea to have fresh fruits and vegetables readily available and to try to keep any unhealthy eating habits to a minimum.

**Transportation** for your international student will normally be provided by you as the host family. You are free to arrange alternate transportation when needed as you would for your own children. Keep in mind that your student may be more accustomed to moving about on his or her own via public transportation. He or she may have a hard time at first adjusting to having to request rides and plan ahead with you. Be patient in this process, and remind your student of the need to consider all family members' needs when it comes to transportation.

**Hosting difficulties** could arise during your student's stay. Generally your student will not be allowed to change host families and will be asked to work through any difficulties with you. However, if you are no longer able to host your student for some reason, or if an irresolvable problem develops between you and your student, changes can and will be made. Possible reasons that you could not continue hosting include moving away, financial difficulties, death, or another significant change in your family makeup. If such a situation arises, inform your ISP coordinator as early as possible so that he or she can start making other arrangements for your student.

Your student should have been instructed to discuss most common relationship issues that arise with you first to see if they can be resolved between you, and you should do the same. If the issue cannot be resolved between just your family and your student, your ISP coordinator can step in and help. Irresolvable problems that could arise might include cases of harassment, abuse, or neglect. If your ISP coordinator suspects that your student is in danger in the home, the student will be removed immediately. If your student has severe behavioral

issues, your student may be asked to leave the school and to return home rather than being assigned to a new host family.

**Visits by your student's family and friends** should be arranged in conjunction with you and with the approval of your ISP coordinator. Typically, visits should be arranged during the last quarter of the school year to make sure that your student has fully adjusted to his or her new environment first. Entertaining visitors from home early in your student's stay can interfere with his or her normal adjustment process. Visits should take place during school breaks. However, hosting your student's visitors during major holidays could be difficult for you, since you may be traveling or hosting other visitors at those times. So make sure to speak openly with your student about when you are able to host visitors. If you do not have space in your home to host visitors, it is OK to let your student know that his or her visitors may have to stay in a hotel.

## D. School Life

During weekdays, your student will spend most of his or her time interacting with people in the host school and participating in events and activities associated with the school. Therefore, it is important for you to know a lot about the life of the school that your student is attending. Learn as much as you can about how to help your student get involved, how to help him or her form friendships, and where to get information about topics your student may have questions about, such as sports or graduation.

**School involvement** for your student will not only mean participating in academics in the classroom and completing homework assignments; it will mean participating in other aspects of school life as well. To begin with, your student may not even be aware of all the available opportunities for getting involved. Spend some time explaining activities to your student. Many activities may be entirely new to your student, such as participating in the school musical in some way, competing with his or her class in spirit week, or even simply bringing a bag lunch from home. Is there an athletic event that your student would like to attend, an art show that your student would like to see, or a field trip that he or she would like to go on? As much as possible, allow and enable your student to participate in these school activities. Doing so will allow your student to learn and grow—and to have fun!

Do not forget to tell your student about the many volunteer opportunities that may be available at the host school. For example, many Christian schools have chapel services; these are an integral part of the school week. Your student

may wish to become more involved by volunteering to be in the school choir or to serve on the worship team. Your student may even be asked to talk about his or her country during a chapel time. Some schools may have mentoring or reading programs that offer opportunities for your student to become involved in helping younger students. Many schools have community outreach opportunities such as collecting for food drives or cleaning up a park. Encourage your student to choose a few of these school activities to be involved in. Help your student choose activities that match his or her gifts, talents, and personality—but also help your international student consider activities that he or she would never have done at home.

**Friendships** at school are an important part of life at your student's age. Encourage your student to be open to other people but cautious. You, other adults, and even your children can offer advice and help as your student begins to associate with particular groups or individuals. Many people may show initial interest in getting to know your student, but your student will soon find out which ones will become lasting friends. The friendships that your student forms may last for years, so encourage him or her to take time to invest in them.

**Sports** eligibility and participation are not usually guaranteed to international students, especially in the United States. In the United States, different states and schools have different eligibility requirements for international students. Often international students are required to wait one year before they are allowed to play a high school varsity sport. Sometimes students may be allowed to participate in junior varsity sports instead. These rules are intended to prevent high schools from recruiting students solely for athletic reasons, a practice that is not allowed in the United States. If the host country is outside North America, rules regarding athletic participation will most likely be less strict, but there may be fewer organized school sports opportunities than in North America.

Another area that may be new or unfamiliar to your international student is that he or she may have to compete or "try out" for a position on a school sports team. So even if he or she is legally allowed to participate, your student still may be "cut" from the team, meaning he or she is not chosen to play on the team after the tryout period.

Participating in sports is a privilege, and we hope that your student will be able to participate in his or her sport of choice. If your student is not able to do so, help him or her try to keep things in perspective. Sports are only a small part of the life of a school, and your student can still be involved in sports even if he or

she cannot play on a varsity team. For instance, your student may be able to be a team manager, to play junior-varsity or intramural sports, or simply to be a big fan. (Other athletic participation options, such as participating in a club sport not sponsored by the host school, might be available in your host community, but you and your student must decide together whether this is a viable option for your family. Your student and his or her parents would be expected to cover such costs.)

**Time management** skills are important for your student to develop as he or she encounters all the activities available at the host school. Help your student to prioritize, and make sure that your student plans his or her days to have enough time for studies in addition to other school activities he or she may wish to participate in. If the host school offers study hall, it may help your student complete assignments if he or she schedules a study hall, especially during the first semester. If instruction at the host school is not in the student's native language, help your student plan on setting aside more time than usual to do homework. Slowly, as your student's language ability improves, completing assignments will take less effort and time.

**Graduation** and a high school diploma from the host school are not usually guaranteed to international students. Generally speaking, if your student has attended the host school for only one year, he or she will not fulfill its graduation requirements because credit from your student's school at home often will not readily transfer. However, if your student chooses to attend the host school for consecutive years, it is more likely that he or she will be able to meet graduation requirements. Students who are not allowed to graduate officially from their host school are often allowed to receive a certificate of attendance and sometimes to participate in graduation.

## E. Community Life

Although participating in the life of your family and of the host school will give your student a taste of the life of your local community, it will be good for him or her to experience your wider community as well. You can help your student get involved in the community by encouraging him or her to attend church with you and to work occasionally, as a typical teenager in your community might do.

**Community involvement** is important for international students. Encourage your student to take time to visit local attractions, points of interest, and places where other students his or her age are likely to gather. Make time to visit the

local library with your student or to take a walk in the park. Introduce your student to your neighbors and invite him or her to join you in volunteer work you may do in your community. Just be careful not to overwhelm your student with lots of activity. Be sure to encourage times of rest as well.

**Church** attendance and participation by your student should be strongly encouraged. Your student will meet new people as he or she takes part in church-sponsored activities. If your church has activities and special events specifically geared toward your student's age group, encourage your student's involvement. A youth group in which your student will be able to interact with and develop friendships with students from other schools is a good place for your student to plug in. Participating in this faith community will allow your student to see another aspect of your culture and country, will expose him or her to new people and experiences, and will help develop his or her spiritual life.

Be sensitive, however, to your student. Church attendance or involvement may not be a part of your student's family background. If your student has grown up in a Christian home, the level of church attendance and involvement in that home could be different from your own, and each student's interest level will be different. In addition, your student may come from a denominational background that differs widely from your own. Inviting rather than forcing your student to take part in what may be very new and possibly uncomfortable activities is the best approach. As you live out the Christian life in front of your student day after day, he or she will see the genuineness of your faith and naturally become interested in learning more.

**Occasional Employment** may be a good way for your student to take part in the life of your community. However, it is important that the type of employment your student engages in be acceptable for teenagers in the host country. In the United States, teenagers often babysit or do yard work to earn a little money. If it is allowed in the host country and does not violate your student's visa restrictions, it may be fun for your student to take part in this type of occasional work. Your student will not only be able to earn a little money but he or she will also experience another aspect of the host culture. Keep in mind that your student's purpose for being in the host country is to study, not to work, so the host country government probably will enforce limits on what your student is allowed to do.

## F. Travel

It is quite likely that your student will want to experience other places in addition to your local community while he or she is here. Therefore, read this section carefully and refer back to it when you and your student have questions about travel. Also check with your ISP coordinator on the specific travel rules for international students at the host school.

**Domestic travel** by your student is usually allowed while he or she is living in the host country. However, your student must follow the ISP's travel rules. Typically, if your student is traveling with you or with host school staff for a program or school-sponsored trip within the host country, your student simply needs to consult you and let the ISP coordinator know the dates and times he or she will be away and the places he or she will be going.

Other travel options your student may have include traveling for church functions or with a friend's family. Check with the ISP coordinator to find out what types of permissions (from the student's parents, you, and/or the ISP coordinator) are necessary for this type of travel. For any trip, your student must be aware of all the responsibilities involved in traveling, including the costs he or she will be expected to cover. Generally, if appropriate adult supervision is provided, domestic travel requests are approved. Under no circumstances should a student be allowed to travel independently, without proper adult supervision. Also, travel should not interfere with normal school attendance; it should take place over weekends or during school holidays.

**International travel** opportunities may also arise for your student during his or her time with you. Many Christian schools take missions trips to other countries throughout the year. If your student wishes to participate in such a trip, he or she will probably need to obtain written permission from his or her parents, you as the host parents, and the ISP coordinator. Always check with your ISP coordinator before your student makes any international travel plans.

Before taking an international trip, your student will need to research the government regulations of the host country regarding his or her visa and make sure he or she has the appropriate documentation to be able to leave and reenter the host country. Your student should keep in mind that simply holding a visa may not guarantee him or her reentry into the host country. (Students studying in the United States on an F-1 visa are generally allowed to leave the country for up to 5 months without having to reapply for a new visa.) Your

student should know that the host family and the host school will not be held responsible for your student getting in and out of the country. If your student travels internationally while living with you, your student and your student's parents should consider the risks and costs involved, and they should be prepared to accept these responsibilities.

## **G. Abuse and Harassment**

Abuse and harassment are very real and serious issues. Your student's safety and security are a high priority, so the host school will want to do everything possible to ensure that your student's experience is free of abuse and harassment. The school will thoroughly screen you as a host family to ensure that each student is placed in a loving and healthy environment. The ISP coordinator and other school staff will also be available to you and your student in case problems arise.

However, life has no guarantees, and the school cannot control the people and situations your student will encounter. During your student's stay with you, if you ever suspect that your student is being abused or harassed by anyone—whether a family member, family friend, school employee, another student, or anyone else—seek out your ISP coordinator immediately and tell him or her about the situation and he or she will help you. It is better to bring up the issue early than allow it to continue for a while. Be as open as possible with your ISP coordinator so that he or she can make sure that your student is safe.



## Sending Your Student Home

How you send your student off is as important as how you welcomed your student and how you related while he or she was in your home.

Although your student may be physically leaving, he or she will always be a part of your family. Please review the following topics before you host your student and as and as his or her time with you draws to a close. When your student has returned home, refer to this section during your own readjustment process.

### A. Early Return

In an extreme case, you student may be asked to return home early. Normally, students are not allowed to return home early unless they have a family emergency or a medical emergency. If your student and his or her parents decide that your student should return home without the approval of the host school, he or she may not be allowed to return to the host country and host school as an international student. In the extreme case in which dismissal is warranted for the student's good and the good of the host school, all parties involved should be kept informed of the situation. You, your ISP coordinator, and your student's parents should agree on the route and method of your student's return.

### B. Departure and Reentry Orientation

As the time of your student's departure for home draws near, your ISP coordinator will arrange for a departure and reentry orientation for you and your student. This orientation is designed to help you and your student know what to expect as he or she leaves. You will talk about saying good-bye well, evaluating the ISP and your experience, and dealing with the readjustment difficulties you may encounter once your student leaves. We will cover each of these topics briefly here, but reading the following paragraphs cannot take the place of attending the departure and reentry orientation.

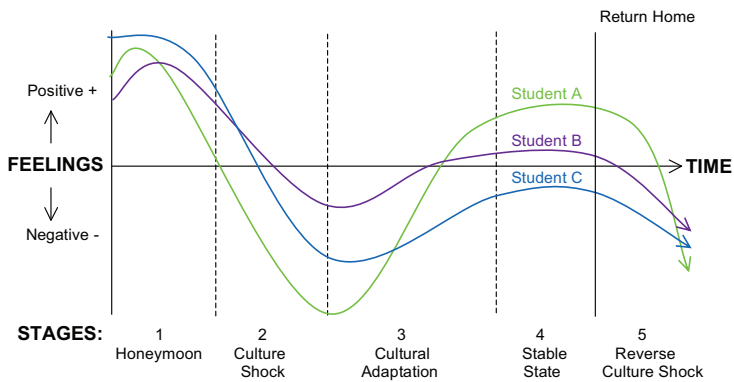
**Good-byes** are important as your student prepares to leave. You can say good-bye well by planning a special time with your student and helping your student arrange to spend time with other important people in his or her life such as teachers or friends. Take time to tell your student how much he or she has affected and blessed your family. Talk about what you have learned and gained.

You may want to give your student a gift to remember you by. Encourage your student to let other people know that he or she is leaving rather than to simply disappear out of their lives. Be sure to exchange contact information with your student so that you can stay in touch, but be realistic about how often you will communicate with each other. If you are interested in visiting your student's home and country, let your student know this and talk about how it can be arranged. Good-byes can be hard, especially if you have grown close to someone, but you should not skip the good-bye process.

**Evaluating your experience** will help both you and the school's ISP. At your departure and reentry orientation, you and your host family will receive instructions about completing an evaluation of your experience. Take time to think carefully about your responses and to reflect on your experience; make sure to complete your evaluation according to the instructions and deadlines given to you by your ISP coordinator. Your evaluation will not only help the school improve the ISP for future host families and students but will also help the school understand the benefits that you gained. As you think about all that you have learned as a host family and the relationship that you have formed with your student, this evaluation will help you understand more clearly how you have grown and changed through serving as a host family. As you prepare to readjust to life without your international student, it is important to go through this evaluation process as a way to close out and to debrief yourself about this phase of your life, so be sure to take the time to do it.

**Readjustment difficulties** may surprise you. You may expect that adjusting to life without your student will simply be a matter of returning to life as usual. However, throughout your experience your family has grown, changed, and adapted to the presence of a new person. Now you will have to start the adjustment process again without your student. Be patient with yourself and with other members of your family during this transition time. Be patient with your student as well—do not expect a lot of communication with your student in the first month or so after departure, because he or she will be readjusting to life at home as well. The following diagram illustrates the stages and emotions that your student will most likely experience when he or she returns home. You and your family may also experience similar feelings.

### Stages of Cross-Cultural Adjustment (Reentry)



Most of this diagram was presented in section 1 of this handbook. Notice that a fifth stage, Reverse Culture Shock, has been added. Your student may experience stress and negative emotions when he or she has to adjust again after returning home. The good news is that the Cultural Adaptation stage will follow your student's Reverse Culture Shock just as it followed his or her initial Culture Shock stage. Your student will relearn how to live in the home country, and his or her emotions will begin to be more positive. Over time, things will become stable for your student once again. The same is true for your family.

Keep in mind that international students who return year after year will go through this cycle to some extent each time they leave or return home. Since these students are still in their developmental years, the longer they attend your school, the more third-culture-kid traits they will develop.

A third-culture kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background. (Pollock 1989)

Families who host students who have been attending the host school for several years will deal with different issues than families who host new students do. Returning students may begin to find returning to and living in their home country harder than coming back to the host country. The host country may begin to feel more like home. Families that host international students for

multiple years should familiarize themselves with the wide body of literature about the needs, challenges, and strengths of TCKs. (One book is recommended in the appendix.)

## C. Will You Host Again?

Host families have three different situations in which they might host again. First, if your student and his or her parents want your student to continue attending the host school and if the school accepts the student again, you may be asked to consider hosting your student for another academic year. You should not feel pressure to do so; you are in no way obligated to host again. However, because of the trust that will have developed between you and your student's family, do not be surprised if they request that you continue as the host family. (If you are unable to host again, your ISP coordinator should work to find another suitable family for your student.)

If your student will be returning to live with you as a continuing international student, sending him or her home for the summer may feel more like sending a child off to camp or to visit relatives for the summer—your student will return to your home after only a brief time away. Therefore, you and your student may not experience as many of the readjustment difficulties described above.

However, perhaps your student is returning and you want to host a student, but you and the student agree that you'd rather not continue living together the next year. In this second situation, just let the ISP coordinator know your wishes. Be sure to communicate what type of student you think would be a good fit in your family.

In a third possible situation, your student is not planning to return for another year of study at the host school. You can then consider whether your family is willing to host a different student. Some host families are eager to host again. They may want to implement the lessons they learned during their first experience, or they may want to learn about a different part of the world. Others may find that they need a break from hosting; still others simply may not desire to do it again.

If you are interested in hosting again, let your ISP coordinator know; also let your ISP coordinator know whether you wish to host the same student or a new student. Hopefully hosting an international student has been a source of joy to you and you will recommend hosting to other families.

## D. Closing Thoughts

Although you did not leave home, you have traveled far and wide by hosting an international student. Your journey does not end here. God has many destinations for you yet to visit, so be open to His leading. Be open in telling others about the incredible opportunities that hosting provides—experiencing other cultures and people. May God take you to greater heights in the coming years as you move toward all that He has for you. Journey well!

The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. (Habakkuk 3:19, NIV)

### Reference

Pollock, David C. 1989. The TCK profile. Seminar material. Wheaton, IL: Interaction Inc. Quoted in Pollock, David C., and Ruth E. Van Reken. 2001. *Third culture kids: The experience of growing up among worlds*. Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 19.

## Appendix: Other Resources

In addition to this handbook, many other resources exist that can help you know what to expect as you prepare to host an international student and that can help you adjust to living with someone from another culture. Here are a few recommendations:

### A. Books

#### Books about American culture

Althen, Gary. 2003. *American ways: A guide for foreigners in the United States*. 2nd ed. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

This book will give you insights into how Americans think. It explores American values, assumptions, and ways of reasoning.

Asitimbay, Diane. 2009. *What's up, America? A foreigner's guide to understanding Americans*. 2nd ed. San Diego, CA: Culturelink Press.

This book is specifically geared toward international students who have questions about Americans. It also contains interesting drawings and descriptions and it compares some American habits with Korean, Japanese, and European customs.

Kieffer, Jarold A. 1998. *What are those crazy Americans saying? An easy way to understand thousands of American expressions*. 3rd ed. SER Publishing.

This book is designed to help nonnative English speakers who may be confused by American English slang and idiomatic expressions. The book focuses on the meaning of 7,000 American expressions.

Lanier, Alison R. 2005. *Living in the U.S.A.* 6th ed. Rev. by Jef C. Davis. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

This is a guide to surviving and thriving in the United States.

#### Books about the adjustment process and crossing cultures

King, Nancy and Ken Huff. 1997. *Host family survival kit: A guide for American host families*. 2nd ed. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

This book provides an overview of hosting, defines the role of the host family, outlines the skills needed by host parents, and discusses the effect of culture on the entire experience. The authors divide the hosting experience into nine stages and help host families know what to expect and how to handle situations that may arise.

Pollock, David C., and Ruth E. Van Reken. 2001. *Third culture kids: The experience of growing up among worlds*. Boston: Nicholas Brealey.

This book discusses the benefits and challenges of growing up as a TCK. The authors provide practical ways to maximize the benefits and minimize the challenges.

Storti, Craig. 2001. *The art of crossing cultures*. 2nd ed. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

This is a more academic book that focuses on how to deal with country shock and culture shock. It includes many examples of cross-cultural misunderstandings, often called *intercultural incidents*.

In addition to these general resources, make sure to consult resources about the specific culture of the student you will be hosting. It can also be helpful to consult resources about your own culture as well.

## B. Websites

**ACSI website.** [www.acsi.org](http://www.acsi.org).

For more information on international student programs and hosting international students, click the Students tab and select *International Students*.

**Host government immigration and visa pages.** Become familiar with the immigration and visa regulations for your international students by visiting pertinent government Web pages for the country in which you live.

**U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement.** Students and Exchange Visitors. International students page: [www.ice.gov/sevis/students/index.htm](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/students/index.htm).

As a family hosting an international student in the United States, you may want to familiarize yourself with pertinent U.S. immigration information. This website contains a wealth of useful information, including arrival tips for international students (translated into Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish) and information on immigration documents and how to maintain your nonimmigrant status. It also provides links to many other useful U.S. Department of Homeland Security websites.

**U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs.** Visas page: [www.travel.state.gov/visa](http://www.travel.state.gov/visa).

This website provides visa information. It contains a list of frequently asked questions, information about specific visa types, contact information for visa services, and much more.





