Dear AYA Student and Host Family,

A great amount of information has been written on preparing for culture shock, home sickness, and creating a bond between students and host families. However it is also important to realize that the adjustment that will need to be made after the student returns to his/her home country is just as crucial to prepare for. Also known as re-entry shock, **Reverse Culture Shock (RCS)** is used to describe the disorientation and adaptation that occur when one is trying to readjust to his or her own culture after spending an extended period of time in a different culture.

Almost all students and host families experience RCS to some degree. For some it is minor, and for others, it is a significant part of their return experience. Below is some information that will help answer your questions about the end experience. How does it feel? Why does it happen? How can it be managed? AYA recommends that you share and discuss this information as a family. It is also helpful to know that both students and host families can feel the symptoms of RCS, so it is crucial to recognize and address.

Participating in a foreign exchange program is a tremendous experience for students and families. We hope that the information provided will help everyone involved in the program reflect and identify the biggest takeaways from this year, and the best ways to move forward now that it is coming to a close.

We recommend utilizing your Local Coordinator and/or AYA Regional Director as resources during this time, and we look forward to hearing your feedback in our end of year survey, coming out soon!

Thank you for your participation, and we wish you all the best with the end of the program year!

Virginia Clark  
Student Support Administrator  
Academic Year in America
Reverse Culture Shock
As students begin to prepare for their return they may experience anxiety or stress about returning home. Students should prepare themselves for the feelings they may experience when they return home. This will allow them to recognize the symptoms of Reverse Culture Shock and know how to manage it. Below is an image of the W curve of culture shock that describes a student’s journey from arrival to reintegration in their home country.

When host families and students sit down to discuss the student’s return to his or her home country, they should take the opportunity to discuss examples of the peaks and valleys they have already experienced in the illustration above.

Facts about RCS:
• RCS is often overlooked or dismissed; only a few expect problems readjusting to home
• RCS is characterized by stages similar to those of culture shock (see above)
• For many, RCS can be much more difficult than initial culture shock
• RCS is different for everyone; the more intense the exchange experience, the more difficult RCS can be
• RCS cannot be avoided, but it can be managed
• RCS affects both the student and host family before and after the student departs

Why does RCS occur?
• People and places have changed
• Students have changed and see things with new eyes
• There is a gap in information; life did not stand still, waiting for the student to return
• People may not be as interested in hearing about their experience as they are in sharing
• Few expected to have trouble adjusting home and therefore do not prepare

Common Pre-Departure Feelings
• Anxiety
• Lack of tolerance/patience
• Tension
• Sadness
• Anger
• Defensiveness
• Mood swings, irritability
• Withdrawal
• Feeling neglected or ignored
• Feeling abandoned, alone or used

It is important to help students recognize that the above-mentioned feelings are common as they face leaving the U.S. Encourage students to talk openly about their feelings with you in the coming weeks to help them deal with their emotions and behaviors.

Re-Entry Concerns Expressed by Exchange Students
Listed below are concerns expressed by several hundred international students who were about to return home. These are just some of the concerns students may have as their return approaches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Concern</th>
<th>Concerns Expressed by Exchange Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>- Fitting back in&lt;br&gt;- Not living up to family’s expectations&lt;br&gt;- Natural family’s jealousy over son or daughter’s attachment/love for host family&lt;br&gt;- Readjusting to the formality of meals, manners, and food&lt;br&gt;- Being treated like a child after having experienced a lot of freedom and independence&lt;br&gt;- Being considered arrogant – not understood and accepted&lt;br&gt;- Boring family with tales of American life&lt;br&gt;- Family will see them as “more America” than Russian, German, etc.</td>
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<td>Friends</td>
<td>- Reactions of old friends to the “new me”&lt;br&gt;- Being able to communicate with friends&lt;br&gt;- Former classmates will have graduated; need to make new friends in a younger class&lt;br&gt;- Friends will think they’re bragging and showing off when speaking about US&lt;br&gt;- Not being able to live up to their expectations&lt;br&gt;- Being able to pick up old friendships – is it possible?</td>
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<td>School</td>
<td>- Making up missed semester or year&lt;br&gt;- Speaking native language well enough&lt;br&gt;- Going back to a more rigorous academic system; more studying&lt;br&gt;- Ability to pass university entrance exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>- Being less fluent in native language now&lt;br&gt;- Mixing English into native language&lt;br&gt;- Losing the ability to speak English well</td>
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<td>Personal</td>
<td>- Missing host family and friends&lt;br&gt;- Wanting to maintain some new attitude&lt;br&gt;- Loss of independence&lt;br&gt;- Less money to spend&lt;br&gt;- Seeing their own country realistically; how to communicate this&lt;br&gt;- Catching up on missed news, developments&lt;br&gt;- Conveying their exchange experience to those at home&lt;br&gt;- Feeling more American than their native nationality&lt;br&gt;- Missing luxuries; having to return to a simpler life</td>
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Coping Strategies and Things to Think About Moving Forward
An awareness of the feelings and behaviors most commonly associated with RCS can help students and host families prepare for their own experience. Knowing what to expect and knowing that certain feelings are normal can make the experience less stressful and more manageable.

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

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