Host Family and Student Orientation

You will be required to conduct a Host Family Orientation for each of your host families prior to the student’s arrival. In compliance with federal regulations, the orientation may not be conducted at the time of the Host Family Interview. Returning AYA Host Families need a Host Family Orientation each year they host, as well as Local Coordinators who host. After conducting the Host Family Orientation, a form must be submitted to the AYA Compliance team (the form can be found in your LC Portal under Resources).

Preparation is the key to building a successful program in your community. Preparing your host families well in advance of their student’s arrival and setting realistic expectations will help you foster a safe and rewarding program for your students and families. The foundation you build at orientation will help you prevent many common adjustment and support issues after the students arrive.

The purpose of the Host Family Orientation is to prepare the host family for the year ahead and to:

- Introduce host families to each other and establish support network when possible.
- Give your family specific program information, including:
  - Program rules and federal regulations
  - The host family safety video
  - Safety information on sexual abuse prevention and awareness
  - Required provisions: own bed, meals, a place to study, transportation
  - Support issues and mediation
  - Culture shock
- Explore and discuss fears and expectations.
- Offer suggestions for dealing with typical situations.
- Your role during the year/semester.
- Answer common questions.
- Create an agenda of activities and events for the year.
- Have fun!

We encourage you to hold a group orientation if you place more than 2 students. Having diverse host families come together at orientation will allow them to share any thoughts or ideas with other host families. Because many host families may not have teens or any children in their home, they can benefit from the knowledge and experience of other host families with children. They will immediately share a common bond and rely on each other for support and resources throughout the academic year.

In this section you'll receive all the tools and paperwork needed for a successful and enjoyable host family orientation. We have it organized into step-by-step procedures, including optional activities to facilitate with your families. These steps below are simply suggestions we have outlined. Please feel free to structure your orientation to best meet your needs. Your LC portal also contains additional resources such to help guide you through the orientation. Local Coordinators must read and be familiar with all policies and procedures regarding Supervision prior to conducting Host Family and Student Orientations.
Preparation Tips

Host Family Orientations may differ depending on your own level of comfort, experience and the number of families you are working with. Please adjust the following suggestions to suit your style.

- Orientation may be conducted with one family or a group of families, however all members of the family should be present if possible.

- Plan to hold your orientation between June and August and at least two to four weeks before the arrival of the student. (Spring semester families will also need an orientation prior to the student's arrival.)

- Experienced Local Coordinators suggest limiting your group size to 30 to 35 people. For some, this may mean holding two sessions. The larger the group, the more difficult it will be to hold an interactive and engaging orientation while ensuring that you are clearly disseminating all required information.

- Another good idea is to conduct your orientation with a nearby Local Coordinator. If you don't live near another Local Coordinator, consider asking a repeat host family to assist. It helps to hear a new voice.

- Although an experienced family may have been previously oriented, it is required they attend orientation annually. There is always more to learn and share and compliance and program regulations are subject to change every year. Experienced host families are invaluable in helping to orient new families. If you do have experienced host families, ask them to talk about their experiences and encourage their active participation.

- Allow up to three hours to complete your orientation. This may sound like a lot of time, but you will need to allow yourself time to discuss the rules, view the safety video and discuss student safety and support issues, and ensure that family members have time to ask questions. Also, once host families get together, they appreciate the opportunity to share questions and to learn that they are not alone.

- Hold your orientation in a place that will be comfortable for your group size—in most cases, your own home will do. Keep in mind that you may want to split off the teenagers for a fears and expectations exercise. Churches, libraries, parks, and local recreation departments may provide free meeting space.

- Collect any material you'll need well in advance. This may include extra host family handbooks (in case families have misplaced their copy), game supplies, and construction paper, depending on which exercise you choose to do.

On the following pages is an outline you may use for your host family orientation. This is available online under LC Resources, Forms and Marketing Materials, Supervision documents: Host Family Orientation PowerPoint and Student Safety Video for Host Families.
Important Topics to Cover

Student Safety

During orientation it is imperative that you discuss student safety, specifically in terms of sexual abuse and exploitation. While the subject can be difficult and at times uncomfortable to discuss, it is critical that all host family members be advised about risks, warning signs and prevention. In addition to monitoring your students closely and seeing them monthly, it is also your responsibility to provide this information about student safety to each of your students and host families.

Education and awareness is a critical component to protecting students and safeguarding their experience. We understand that sexual abuse is difficult to talk about, and as a result have created a host family safety video to ensure that consistent information is being disseminated to our participants. You are required to show this video at your orientation. The Student Safety video can be found in your LC Portal under Resources.

You are strongly encouraged to view the videos several times and become familiar with the information covered. The video covers sensitive information regarding sexual abuse, assault and appropriate vs inappropriate behaviors between teenagers and adults and their host families. Although the content may be uncomfortable to watch or hear at times, it is imperative that you empower your host families with this information and understand the warning signs, prevention and emergency procedures in the event that one of your students is ever in an unsafe situation.

Flights

By the time of orientation, you may already be aware of the student’s arrival date from your Regional Director. As far as flight information is concerned, the AYA office will be contacting all families and Local Coordinators via email with regard to student flights as soon as possible. With some students, we can tell you weeks in advance. However, some of this information will not be known to us until only a week or a few days prior to arrival. Also, although we have indicated your preferred arrival airport, in some circumstances, arrival into a specific airport can save the student a significant amount of money. Please be sensitive to this if the airport is not the one in your hometown.

Although the day of arrival can often be hectic, please remind your families this is just one day of a 10-month experience. Please do your best to keep any inconveniences in perspective.

Please let your host families know that you will act as a point person for flight questions. Make sure you have cell phone numbers in case you need to pass along information that day. As much as we enjoy speaking with host families, at this busy time of year it is easier for us to speak with one Local Coordinator rather than 10 host families!

Schools

Briefly review the following (you should adapt this information to fit the schools in your area):

- You have enrolled the student to attend the local high school.
The family should take the students to the school for registration and course selection. It is advantageous if you can be there.

Students must take a full course load.

Students must enroll in a regular English class and an American government or U.S. history class, as well as a math and science class.

Get a sport/club schedule or activity guide from your school to give to Host Families at orientation. Joining activities is the best way for students to make friends.

Students individually know if they can receive credit for their year abroad. If they can, it is up to them to enroll in the proper courses and obtain necessary transcripts. Brazilian, Spanish, and Italian students have a procedure to follow called "convalidation," through which they can transfer their credit back to their home. This process requires that the students be placed in the correct grade level. These students have been told about these procedures.

Remember that your student may be very anxious to go to school. Many former students look back on the first day of school as one of the scariest days of their lives!

**Insurance**

All students on the Academic Year in America program arriving for the 2014-2015 Academic School Year will now be insured through CareMed International Travel Insurance, underwritten by the Ace European Group, LTD. Our Norwegian students are on an insurance plan provided by our Norwegian overseas partners.

CareMed utilizes the *First Health Network*. Students are encouraged to use in network providers. You can search for these providers and policy information by visiting [http://caremed-assistance.com/index.php](http://caremed-assistance.com/index.php) and clicking on “Provider Search” and "Insurance Policy" in the left hand column. To get a copy of your student's insurance card, you can obtain this through your LC Portal, under "My Territory", then "My Placements".

**CareMed Assist:**
The Emergency Assistance Company has also changed for the 2014 participants. AYA students will now be able to contact AXA Assist for Medical or Travel Assistance.

**CareMed Assist 24-Hour**

**Medical Emergency Numbers and E-mail:**

USA & Canada/ 1-855-657 3434 (toll-free)

From outside the US/ +49 (0)1803-228 500
(Tariff: 0,09 €/min, max. 0,42 €/min, cell phone)

E-mail: caremed-assist@axa-assistance.de

**Claims**

Cultural Insurance Services International is the administrator for CareMed International Travel Insurance; therefore, claims can still be submitted to the same office:

CISI
1 High Ridge Park
Stamford, CT, 06905
Fax: 203-399-5596
Claimhelp@culturalinsurance.com
Student Travel

Independent Travel

If your student wants to travel overnight without your family or not on a school trip, the AYA office must have written permission from the student’s natural parents for the trip, and the student must travel with a responsible adult (21 years old or older.) It is the student’s responsibility to contact you at least two weeks in advance whenever they want to travel without their host parents, in order to complete an Independent Student Travel form (found in your LC Portal under Resources). Activities or travels which include you or a host parent do not require special permission. A school sponsored group trip does not require special permission either. However, if travel away from home will be more than two days, the host family should advise you so AYA can reach the student in case of an emergency involving the natural family.

Traveling Abroad

If your student plans to travel outside the US with their host family while on the exchange program, it is their responsibility to contact their consulate in the country where they intend to travel to obtain all necessary information and documents before traveling. You should allow a minimum of 6 weeks to complete these requirements. If the student does not obtain the appropriate paperwork, there is a possibility that he or she will not be allowed to re-enter the U.S. Here are the initial steps to complete:

1. Students should check their J-1 Visa inside their passport for an “M” stamped in the entries block. If an “M” is stamped there, this indicates that it is a multiple entry visa and will allow the student to successfully re-enter the United States.
2. The student or host family should contact the nearest consulate of the country to which they are traveling to find out if additional documents (i.e. visa) are required for travel.
3. Students must send their original DS 2019 form to the AYA office for signature at least 2 weeks prior to the intended travel date via traceable mail (i.e. FedEx or UPS).
4. Student should never relinquish their DS 2019 form and should always bring this with them along with all necessary paperwork when traveling outside the U.S.
5. Students should make copies of all documents before turning them over to a consulate.

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

Note: If your student has extended their visa from a semester to a full year, they CANNOT travel outside the U.S. for any reason. They will NOT be allowed back in the U.S. even if they possess a new ‘extended’ DS 2019.
Student Support and Disciplinary Policies

Program Rules

Points to cover

- Highlight key rules
- Highlight key policies
- Discuss the Code of Conduct

Emphasize all major rules and policies, including, but not limited to:

- Consumption of alcohol and use of illegal drugs is prohibited.
- No driving, although students may enroll a driver education program.
- Student must enroll in English and a US history or government class.
- Natural parents, other relatives, and friends may not visit without the agreement of the host family. No visits are allowed until the end of the program.

Refer them to the rules and policies section of their Host Family and Student Handbooks for more information. Both of these handbooks are found in your LC Portal under, you guessed it: Resources!

Support Issues and Mediation

Now is the time to set and help manage expectations for host families, clarify what your role is, and how you are here to help. It will be important to remind your host families of the following:

- No matter how wonderful your student is, there will be issues that arise throughout the year. This is very healthy and a normal part of any family dynamic and certainly any experience that involves integrating a whole new person into your home and lifestyle!

- Adolescence is a global truth! Your exchange student is from a different country, but is still a teenager and teenaged behaviors cross all cultures. Expect to deal with typical teenaged issues:
  - Pushing boundaries and challenging authority
  - Reluctance to do chores
  - A lot of time spent on communicating with friends via phone, text and social networking sites
  - Rivalry with friends and host siblings
  - Peer pressure, difficulty fitting in
  - Self-involvement; occasional lack of consideration and awareness about how certain actions and behaviors affect those around them.

- You will be contacting them (and the student) monthly (minimum) to find out if there are any adjustment or behavioral issues that can be addressed. Remind them that they should contact you between visits if they have any questions or concerns about their hosting experience.
• You will come over to conduct mediation anytime a problem comes up, big or small! It’s important to address even the smallest issues, so that they don’t become larger. The most common problem that host families have is waiting until little problems become big ones, at which point they are much more difficult to resolve.

• Do not treat your student like a guest! Your student is now your new son or daughter, treat him or her like a member of your family; hold them accountable to your family standards and be consistent. The patterns that you set during the first few weeks of placement are difficult to break later on. This means:
  o Do not pay for anything during the first few weeks that you don’t intend to pay for, for the remainder of the program year (i.e. clothes, toiletries)
  o Do not do the student’s laundry, allow them to stay up late or not do chores, if you don’t intend to keep that expectation through the end.
  o Encourage families to complete the Expectations Worksheet as soon as their student’s arrive. This is a very effective way to set clear guidelines and will serve as a written point of reference should issues arise later in the year.
  o Communicate clearly. If something bothers you, tell your student immediately; often times students have no idea they are doing something that is upsetting the family. Remember, there are cultural and teenaged behaviors that simultaneously influence a student’s behavior, so don’t assume they have any idea how you are feeling. Be clear, be kind and be consistent.

**Disciplinary Policies**

It’s important to run through our disciplinary policies with host families so that they understand that AYA has rules and consequences for not abiding by them. Discuss each step: warning, probation and disqualification; however, please reiterate that disciplinary notices are issued at the discretion of your Regional Director and the AYA disciplinary committee and will only be considered after a documented mediation has occurred. Please let them know that we make every effort to counsel and support students and host families so that everyone can enjoy a successful and rewarding experience.

**Calendar of Events**

While you have all your host families gathered for the orientation, it is a great time to make plans for the year. Have the school calendar available for review. You should think ahead of activities that you feel would be exciting for your students (see “Your Role as an LC” section for recommendations). Briefly review these ideas with your host families and then ask for suggestions. After listening to all suggestions, ask for volunteers to plan and/or host events and activities. If you have a large group, families may want to team up to work together. Prepare a sign-up sheet in advance that you may pass around for volunteers. This is also a great time to discuss if fund-raisers will be required for any major field trips. If so, ask for assistance in coordinating and carrying out specific tasks. Remember, these activities will truly be the high-lights of the year for the students. It will also give host families a fresh and different perspective on how they view American holidays, special events and typical activities.
Wrap-up (Q & A)

Points to cover

- Ask families to complete an evaluation and sign the attendance sheet. Host Family signatures are required. This sheet must be submitted to the AYA office.
- Answer questions.
- Confirm dates for calendar of events.
- Hand out a group address/phone/e-mail list. Encourage families to use each other as resources.
- Ask whether families feel more comfortable about the host experience than they did a few hours ago.
- Thank the families for coming. Acknowledge the time they’ve given.

Sample Invitation Letter

Dear Host Family:

Thank you for opening your home to an Academic Year in America student for the coming school year! This will be the beginning of a life changing experience. So far, six students have been placed in our community. As of last week, 14 students are coming to <insert state>. This letter is to invite you and your family to a required orientation meeting along with the other local host families.

Orientation will be held at <insert date and time and location> I have enclosed a map for your assistance.

Jane Smith, another Local Coordinator, will join me in leading the meeting. Jane has invited a family that hosted last year and they will share with you some of their experiences.

All family members are encouraged to attend the orientation. Orientation is mandatory for all host families and is an excellent time to ask questions, express concerns, and get more prepared for your student. During the orientation, you will also have the opportunity to network with other families that will be hosting in the area. There will be a separate discussion group for host siblings to help them get ready for a new life experience. In preparation for the meeting, we suggest families read their host family handbooks and review the materials sent to you by AYA. If you have not yet received this information via email, please contact me immediately.

Please come casual. Snacks will be offered. Jane and I look forward to seeing you in three weeks. If you cannot attend, please let me know as soon as possible. We will have to schedule a separate session for your family.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Local Coordinator

Your Number
P.S. There are still students in need of homes. If you have any leads for host families in the area, or in nearby communities please give me a call! The more the merrier!

**Orientation Tips**

**Host Family Orientation:**

- If possible, arrange seating so that people can see each other and you. Younger children and teenagers can sit on the floor if chairs are limited.

- Explain that you'd like to break the ice with introductions and with families sharing their reasons for hosting. Ask for a volunteer to begin.

- Introduce yourself as well, and explain what led you to your decision to become a Local Coordinator. Chances are you have already discussed this with your families, but if you are conducting a joint orientation with Local Coordinator, it doesn't hurt to briefly repeat this information.

  1. Wrap up the introductions by referring to your list of goals for the orientation.
  2. Meet other host families
  3. Talk about expectations.
  4. Give family required safety and program information.
  5. Raise awareness about culture shock and typical teenaged issues.
  6. Allow siblings to design welcome posters for students.
  7. Hand out small American Flags for families to give to their students at arrival.
  8. Answer questions.

- Briefly tell the families what you expect for the next three hours. Mention that you will try to do as little lecturing as possible and that there will be a short break at the midpoint. Encourage everyone's participation.

- If possible, separate the teenagers for this exercise. Siblings are more often concerned about personality, friends, and popularity. (This is a great time for the siblings to design the welcome poster.) Parents are often more concerned about social adjustment, household routines, and how the newcomer will affect their own kids, or dating, and sexual issues. Often times another Local Coordinator, a former host family or your family can assist with the teens.

- Give every family a blank piece of paper. Ask them to label one side "fears" and other side "expectations".

- Ask them to list three or more things on each side of the chart. Allow five minutes.

- When everyone is finished, go around the room and ask each family to call out one fear. Add that to your list on the wall.
• Review each item under "fears." As family members if the fear is realistic or unrealistic. What practical steps would they take to overcome or minimize the fear? Encourage discussion and independent thinking.

• Repeat steps four and five for "expectations." Talk about whether expectations are realistic or probable. If expectations did not happen, how will it affect the hosting experience? Again, encourage independent thinking.

• Respond to the best of your ability. A list of typical fears and expectation appears on the next page. If you don't have an answer to a particular question, tell a group you will find out the answer and get back to them.

Typical Fears- Host Families

We spend quiet evenings at home and our student is used to the big city life. What if he or she doesn't like our lifestyle?

All students will go through an adjustment period as they get use to their new community and lifestyle. The student is here to learn about the US family life from an insider's point of view. Your job as a host family is to share your lifestyle and lend a helping hand. Point out that everyday activities will be new and interesting to students and reassure family that they have lots to offer.

We may have trouble communicating with our student.

This is a common fear shared by many host families. Families should expect a few communication challenges and be ready to come up with creative solutions. Point out that the first couple of weeks are the toughest. This period is stressful for the student as comprehension is usually low. Suggest families write down important messages, post a family schedule, or ask students to repeat what they have been told. Emphasize patience and humor.

Our student may have more spending money than our own children.

In many cases it appears that students have plenty of spending money, and this can cause jealousy among siblings. Families can explain that this is a temporary situation, as exchange students want to shop for presents that they cannot buy at home and this is an once-in-a-lifetime experience for them. Remind families that many students arrive with all of their spending money, so it seems like quite a lot. Spread out over 10 months, it may be just enough to get by for the year.

We're worried that we will lose privacy.

This is a natural feeling, especially for host parents whose children have left home, or who have young children who go to sleep early. Remind families that this fear is more likely to happen if they insist on treating their student as a guest rather than a family member. If families feel crowded, they have several options: rearrange schedules, encourage the student to get involved in school activities, or pick one night a week to go out for supper while the student eats pizza at home with friends. Ask families with teenagers how they handle the privacy issue. Tip: Coordinate with other host families for a student-free weekend. Take turns keeping each other's student for a weekend.
What if we're not comfortable with some of our student's habits, i.e., sleeping late, or hygiene?

Talk about it with your student. Explain how the routine works around your house, and ask the student how his or her family handles a similar situation. By showing an interest in the student’s lifestyle, he or she may find it easier to adapt to your routine. Encourage families to look at these conversations as learning experiences, not lectures.

**Typical Expectations**

**Our student will fit in and become a family member right away.**

Especially during the first weeks or even months, it may be challenging for your student to fit in. It may also be challenging for you to fit another person into your daily routine; occasional difficulties and frustrations may arise. However, you will build a relationship over time.

**Our student will become best friends with our children.**

Whether your children will become friends with your student will depend on many things - ages, personalities, interests, and whether there are feelings of rivalry or friendship. It's common for host brothers and sisters to have an excellent friendship at home while maintaining a very different circle of friends and interest. A successful hosting experience is not in any way dependent on your children being best friends with your student. Like normal siblings, they will experience disagreements.

**Our student will speak fluent English.**

Your student’s English ability upon arrival will depend on standards of English teaching in his or her country, and the years of English study he or she has taken. Some countries emphasize book learning over conversational skills. In those cases, students will be able to read and write easily, but have trouble with oral comprehension. It is also common for the stress of the first weeks to cause both a student’s fluency and comprehension to decline. This is natural and is to be expected. Most students are very comfortable with our English after four to six weeks. Remind families to be patient, to speak slowly (not loudly!) and to come up with creative solutions for communication problems.

**Our student will be just like we imagined him or her to be from their application.**

Their student will be a lot like what you read in their application. But the application can’t tell you everything about your student. Remind families that their student completed the application many months ago. Their student has probably changed a little over the course of a year. They will have plenty of time to get to know their student once they arrive. **The best expectations are no expectations!**

**We will learn all about our student’s culture.**

Students like to share their culture with their host families, but they're often unsure of how to do so. Families can set aside some time to ask their student about his or her culture, traditions, family, and lifestyle.

- Encourage families to have empathy for their student, to be in their shoes. Explain how important it is for the family to help familiarize the student with his or her new environment.
- Ask if there are any questions about how to handle arrival day or the first few days.
If you have experienced host families, ask for their key pieces of advice. If you have a current or returned student, ask him or her to tell the group what the first week was like.

**Student Orientation**

AYA students receive both a pre-departure orientation in their home country and an arrival orientation in the U.S. Pre-departure information is provided by the AYA partner abroad through group or individual meetings. This information advises program participants about culture shock and about their responsibilities as exchange student ambassadors from their homelands. It also encourages them to adopt realistic expectations about their year in the US and to set personal goals for this unique learning opportunity.

Arrival orientation is conducted either at a group welcome orientation provided by AYA or at a student orientation, conducted by the Local Coordinator within two weeks after the student’s arrival in the host community. If a student flies directly to the host community, the student’s supervising Local Coordinator is required to conduct this orientation. Approximately 50% of the students attend the group orientation at the welcome program and about 50% of the students are required to go through the orientation in their local communities provided by their Local Coordinators. The AYA National Office will notify the Local Coordinator if they are required to provide an orientation to any of their students. Seasoned Local Coordinators say that this local student orientation is a great opportunity to bond with your students and share local information about the community and schools. AYA encourages Local Coordinators to include all students in the local student orientation. It will give you the chance to reiterate the program rules and answer any questions they may have now that they have arrived in their new home town.

Just as with the host family orientation, the student orientation is your best opportunity to build reasonable expectations and excitement among your students. The foundation you build at student orientation will help you prevent or minimize common adjustment problems.

We have provided you with the tools and paperwork needed for a successful and enjoyable student orientation. Many of the games used in the host family orientation, i.e. Fears and Expectations, can be effectively adapted for your student orientation if you have a group. These steps below are simply suggestions we have outlined. Please feel free to structure your orientation to whatever works best for your students. You may utilize the intranet for additional resources to guide you through the orientation.

Along with the outline, we have listed some key points to highlight during the orientation. For more detailed information on any points that have not been highlight below, please refer to the Student Handbook and relevant sections of the Resource Guide. Remember, while the primary objective of this orientation is to be informative and prepare the student for the year ahead, it can also be very fun and entertaining. Include as much local information for students as possible during the orientation.

On the following pages is an outline you may use for your student orientation. This is available online on the LC Portal under LC Resources, Forms and Marketing Materials, Supervision documents: Student Orientation PowerPoint and Student Safety Video. Also, each student that is present at the orientation must sign the Orientation form. You must then submit this form to Compliance as soon as possible.

**Student Safety**

Student Safety is your #1 priority as a Local Coordinator. As the students primary advocate in the community, it is your responsibility to do everything you can to support your students and educate them
on this important topic. Awareness is a critical component to protecting students and safeguarding their experience.

We understand that the topic of sexual abuse is difficult to talk about, and as a result have created a student safety video to ensure that consistent information is being disseminated to our participants. You are required to show this video at your orientation.

It is important that students hear about this from you, and understand that your role is to support them, take care of them, and help them immediately, should they ever find themselves in an unsafe or unsuitable situation. This does not just apply to sexual abuse – remind your students that they should contact you immediately if they are every in any type of uncomfortable situation related to their host family dynamic, living conditions, friends, health or school.

You are strongly encouraged to view the videos several times and become familiar with the information covered. The video covers sensitive information regarding sexual abuse, assault and appropriate vs. inappropriate behaviors between teenagers and adults and their host families. Although the content may be uncomfortable to watch or hear at times, it is imperative that you empower your student(s) with this information so they understand the warning signs, prevention and emergency procedures in the event that one of your students is ever in an unsafe situation.

**Program Rules**

**Points to cover**

- Highlight key rules
- Highlight key policies

Emphasize major rules and policies instead of reviewing all of them.

- Consumption of alcohol and use of illegal drugs is prohibited. This is a zero tolerance policy and will result in immediate termination from the program. Students may be asked to submit to a drug test if there is reasonable suspicion of drug use.

- Smoking or possession of cigarettes is prohibited for all AYA students, including those who are 18 years old.

- Students may not change families without due process and approval from the AYA national office. Changing host families is a last resort and will not be considered without extensive mediation and counseling unless there are extenuating circumstances.

- If a student is suspended or expelled from school for any reason, it is grounds for immediate dismissal from the program.

- Students must abide by all program and host family rules.

- Respect the host family. Do not speak negatively about the host family to others and follow the proper chain of communication if they have concerns or problems.
• Be careful about posting on social networking sites. Any inappropriate photos or comments may compromise their standing on the program.

• No driving, although students may enroll in a school sponsored driver education program. They may only take drivers education if it makes sense in the state they live in, if their natural parents and host parents agree and if they have insurance to cover it. Their insurance will not cover private school driving lessons.

• Students must maintain a GPA of C+ or better. If they are unable to meet this requirement they will be asked to hire a tutor or seek extra help, at their own expense, and if they do not improve they will be placed on warning or probation. Continued and consistent failure to meet academic requirements may result in termination from the program.

• Students must clear any independent travel with the national office. Travel is subject to the approval of the AYA office and will not be permitted for any student’s in poor academic or behavioral standing. Students may not travel without an adult or visit friends or relatives during the year.

• Natural parents, other relatives, and friends may not visit without the agreement of the host family. No visits are allowed until after April 15th. End of year travel is limited to traveling with the host family or natural parents. Students must return home within 2 weeks of the last day of school.

Refer students to the rules and policies section of their host family and student handbook for more information.

**Support Issues and Mediation**

• Now is the time to set and help manage expectations for students. It will be important to remind your students of the following: No matter how wonderful your host family is, there will be issues that arise throughout the year. This is very healthy and normal part of any family dynamic and certainly any experience that involves moving in with a whole new family!

• Adaptation process
  
  o Adjustment takes time! Do not expect to fit in immediately. Be patient and allow yourself at least 30 days to settle in and get to know the family and school. Remind them of the following:

  o Their exchange experience is similar to a rollercoaster ride. At first they are excited and maybe a little nervous. When they reach the top they are scared and want to get off but they can’t! They are along for the ride and by the end of the ride they get off and think to themselves “I want to go again!” Remind them that their exchange year, just like a roller coaster, will have highs and lows, but the end result will be fun and create a lasting memory!

  o Honeymoon stage – Reminds students that the honeymoon stage is a period of time after people enter a situation where everything is wonderful, exciting and fun. Relate this to their experience by explaining that after some time the honeymoon period ends and reality sets in, as they will recognize this as doing chores, homework and adjusting to a family’s daily routine.
o Explain that culture shock can set in at different times throughout the year, but typically it happens after the honeymoon period ends (3 – 6 weeks after arrival).

* Culture Shock

o Explain that the student(s) may experience culture shock at various points throughout the year – in order to recognize if they are experiencing culture shock or not, review the symptoms with the student(s).

  ▪ No energy/exhausted
  ▪ Anxious
  ▪ Feel sick
  ▪ Extreme homesickness
  ▪ Crying for no reason
  ▪ Extreme anger
  ▪ Psychological disorientation

o Explain to them that those symptoms show that culture shock can present itself in many different ways. It may even cause them physical symptoms such as feeling ill, tired and leaving them with no energy.

o It's important to remind students that this is a normal part of their experience and recognizing that will help them to get through it. They may be feeling one or many of these symptoms over the next few day or weeks and that is okay. Emphasize the importance of recognizing these feelings and talking about them. It will NOT help them to deny that they are feeling this way, fight it or leave. Refer back to the roller coaster - they are along for the ride and when they get off they will want to go again.

* Expectations for their Experience

o Remind them that they are here to experience daily life with an American family; it is not a sightseeing trip or vacation.

o It is important for them to not compare their experience, host family or home to anyone else’s. Their experience will be unique to them and will be different than their friends.

o Explain that while it is great to occasionally communicate with friends who are also on the program, students should be wary about frequent or excessive communication as it may alter their expectations about their own experience – they may begin to base their expectations for their experience on that of someone else rather than their own.

o Limit time talking to friends and family from home; while this may make a student feel better at first – it can also prevent students from truly getting to know the host family and making new friends. Their friends and family will be there when they return, let them know they can check in with them, but not all the time!

o Share interests, customs and information about their natural family with their host family.
- Expect to have disagreements with host siblings and friends. This is normal and can be worked out.

- Peer pressure, difficulty fitting in. Advise them to talk to their host family or local coordinator if they are struggling with these issues.

- Prepare for less independence. Remind students that American teenagers do not enjoy as much freedom as many European or Latin American students. Remind them that they will need to abide by curfew, ask permission before going anywhere and check in with host parents frequently about their whereabouts. This is not because they are not trusted, this is cultural.

- They will need to get rides to and from activities. Their host parents are not responsible for driving them to all their social and extracurricular events. Make friends, carpool and talk to their local coordinator if your host parents are not able to get them to and from certain places.

- Host families are not responsible for entertaining students or scheduling trips for them. Students should get involved in school activities, community service, and youth programs whenever possible. This is a great way to make friends and try new things.

- While the student is now considered a member of the host family, they are still expected to pay for their personal expenses. This includes phone bills, toiletries, clothes, entertainment, books, school activities (prom tickets, uniforms, yearbooks), and school lunches.

- Remind students to budget carefully so that they do not run out of money. Students should never borrow money from their host family (or lend money to any host family members). Students should keep cash in the bank and be careful of spending throughout the program.

- Try new things! This is an exciting year filled with new opportunities. Get involved with new hobbies and activities.

- Remember, the host family is just as nervous as they are. Help them by being open, engaging them in conversation, and sharing in their family traditions.

**Local Coordinator’s Role**

- You will be contacting your student, in-person, every other month (you may substitute Skype call, phone call, or email if you absolutely cannot meet with them in person, but this should not become a substitute for visits) to see how they are doing and to find out if there are any adjustment or behavioral issues that can be addressed. Remind them that they should contact you between visits if they have any questions or concerns about their hosting experience.

- You will be contacting your student every other month, that you are not scheduled to see them in person, via phone call or email, or Skype, to touch base on how their experience is going and to follow up on what was discussed during the in-person visits.
You will come over to conduct mediation anytime a problem comes up, big or small! It's important to address even the smallest issues, so that they don't become larger. The most common problem that students and families have is waiting until little problems become big ones, at which point they are much more difficult to resolve.

Remind students that you are their advocate. Students are often under the impression that their Local Coordinator is friends with their host parents and is therefore not objective. Even if you are friendly with the host family, please reiterate that your primary responsibility is to take care of the student and be objective. Please assure them that they can speak freely about anything that's on their mind and that you will work with them to resolve any issues that come up, even if they have complaints about the host family.

**Typical Fears - Students**

- Feeling Homesick
  
  It is important to remind students that homesickness is a perfectly natural feeling and even a good feeling because it means that they love and value what they have at home. Make sure students understand that it is important to acknowledge these feelings; however they should spend their time on getting to know their host family, community and high school peers. Keeping busy is the best way to combat feelings of homesickness! Students should also be aware that homesickness does not necessarily begin and end during the first couple of weeks on the program. Students can feel homesick during various times of their experience, specifically holidays. Students should share their own holiday traditions from home during these moments, and put forth the effort to spend time with their host family, even if it they are missing home.

- Food
  
  This may seem like a common cultural adjustment, however many students struggle with exploring new foods and eating habits of their host family. A fluctuation in a student’s weight or eating habits can also be a symptom of culture shock, which can occur at many points during the year. Remind students of the importance of healthy eating habits and that they can reach out to their host family or Local Coordinator with any questions about how to maintain a healthy and balanced diet, along with a healthy perspective on weight loss or gain. Many exchange students fear that they will gain weight on the program; while we encourage students to make good nutritional choices, it’s important to always encourage them to remain flexible and not let this fear diminish their experience or willingness to try new things. It is also important to review their host family’s meal times and expectations. Some families eat together every night and will insist that a student join them and actively participate in dinnertime conversation. Conversely, a student may be asked to warm up their own dinner once in a while, or may find that their family eats separately due to busy schedules. Remind students that while their host family is responsible for providing breakfast and dinner during the week, they are not responsible for preparing these meals every day. There is no typical American family, and students should be flexible and help out when necessary.
Making Friends

- Remind your students that making friends is not easy, regardless if you are an exchange student or not. Building friendships requires someone to take the first step in introducing themselves, being outgoing and friendly. It is easy for an exchange student to sit back and wait for someone to approach them and ask to sit with them during lunch, or to be invited to the movies or a homecoming game. Unfortunately this is not a realistic expectation and can set the student up for feeling inadequate or unprepared for the program, and in turn causing them to reach out to their natural parents and friends more often. Explain to students the importance of not spending all of their time exclusively with other foreign students, especially if they share the same native language. This can prevent them from developing a wide circle of friends make close, meaningful friendships. In most cases, the exchange student will need to take the first step in initiating friendships. A great way to initiate these friendships is to join as many activities as possible – whether it is sports, clubs, youth groups or community volunteer opportunities. Attending different school functions, such as plays, or sport games, also offers the opportunity to introduce themselves and get to know other teenagers. Remind students that the social life of a lot of American teenagers’ revolve around high school events and activities.

Loss of Independence and Social Life

- Many students will find that they are limited in what they can and cannot do socially with friends while they are in the U.S. Remind students that families in America are generally more conservative than they are used to in their home country. Their host family has been tasked with the responsibility of keeping them safe, and with that students will be expected to ask permission to go anywhere and check in frequently as well as when plans change. Even students with the most active social lives may sometimes have to rely on their host family and friends to go places as most students are placed in rural America, where there is limited or no public transportation. While some students may express concern or frustration about this, it is important to help them understand that this is the norm in the U.S. and to never assume that someone is going to be able to give them a ride and planning ahead is important and expected. Make sure that you go over a host family’s requirement for going out with friends, or other social events – for example, if they need the phone number of the friend that the student will be with, etc. Another important topic to cover is “curfew.” Many exchange students are unfamiliar with that specific term, so it is important to explain that a curfew is a specific time that a student must return home. Go over what curfew time is expected of the student, and what to do if circumstances cause the student to miss curfew.

Social Media

While on this program, the majority of students will be using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to communication with friends and family in the United States and in their home countries. Despite the fact that social media can be a great way to connect with friends and family
and share their experiences, when used carelessly to post pictures or comments, it can also be damaging and dangerous.

Remind students that as long as they are sponsored by AYA, they are a reflection of our program and an ambassador to their country. Their actions must reflect the highest standards of behavioral and program expectations. Encourage students to avoid making any posts or posting any photos of themselves that portray them in a compromising manner or that reflect poorly on their abilities to make sound decisions. Some photos and captions can be viewed as a negative representation of themselves and their role as an AYA student.

It is important to explain to students that what they post on these sites can be viewed by others. Posts on social media sites will follow them well beyond their time on the program, and it is always available for someone to search and see. Posts that they feel are ‘jokes’ can be misinterpreted and perceived as inappropriate or culturally insensitive.

Not only being mindful of their own posts, but also of who they befriend on social networking sites is also critical to remaining in good standing with their host family and AYA. Remind students that the people and friends that they associate themselves with are also a reflection of them and they can be associated with the activities these individuals participate in as well – whether those activities are good or bad.

Some other guidelines to follow include:

- Do not make comments about your host family, LC, or AYA.
- Do not make passive aggressive comments about peers or family that could be misinterpreted
- Do not post pictures of yourself making inappropriate gestures, dressing provocatively etc.
- Do not share controversial political or social photos that might be interpreted as supporting a cause that contradicts your personal values
- Do not use expletives
- Do not befriend those that post inappropriate comments or photos that you can be unintentionally associated with

Explain to the students that failure to comply with these guidelines can result in disciplinary action up to, and including, termination from the program. Anything posted on a social media website, regardless of privacy settings, is considered public information and can result in negative consequences.

**Disciplinary Policies**

It’s important to run through our disciplinary policies your students. Discuss each step: warning, probation and disqualification. Please let them know that we make every effort to counsel and support students and host families so that everyone can enjoy a successful and rewarding experience. This can all be found in the Student Handbook in the Resources section of the LC Portal.

**Calendar of Events**

Share important dates for activities as discussed in your host family orientation session with your students so they can look forward to these events.
Wrap-up (Q & A)

Points to cover

- Ask each student to sign the attendance sheet. Student signatures are required and sheets must be submitted to AYA Compliance.
- Answer questions.
- Hand out your contact information, AYA’s contact information and emergency phone numbers.
- Remind the student that you are there to support them and they should not hesitate to contact you with any questions.