AYA Student Handbook

Your Guide to a Successful Year in the United States

Student Name: ________________________________  Student ID ________________
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June 2016
Welcome to the United States of America!

You are about to begin a great adventure — exploring life in an American community, studying in a U.S. high school, and becoming a member of a new family.

You should be proud of your participation in the Academic Year in America (AYA) program. It takes courage to leave home and study in another country. The experience of studying abroad is not always fun; learning a new language and fitting into a new culture can be difficult. But if you take the extra steps to participate fully in program activities, meet new people, get involved at school, and speak English, we promise you will grow in knowledge and maturity.

The purpose of this handbook is to help you begin this adventure and give you an idea of what to expect from U.S. culture and the AYA program. The handbook outlines important rules and guidelines that are your responsibility to follow while staying with your host family and attending school. Keep this handbook throughout your stay in the U.S.; you will find it a handy reference whenever you have a question. If you have a question that is not addressed in the handbook, please ask your Local Coordinator or host family or call your Regional Director at the AYA National Office.

Remember…you are not alone. The AYA organization is here to help you resolve problems and make the most of your exchange experience in the U.S. By following the rules and participating in family, school, and community activities, you will gain skills that will enrich your life and change you forever.

Best wishes for a great year!

Melanie French
Executive Director
AIFS Foundation
The AIFS Foundation

The Academic Year in America (AYA) program has been in operation since 1981 and is conducted under the auspices of the American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS) Foundation. The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit educational organization founded in 1967 with the assistance of the late Robert F. Kennedy. Its mission is to promote worldwide understanding through cross-cultural exchange.

In addition to sponsoring the AYA program, the AIFS Foundation awards grants to high schools for projects that encourage intercultural awareness. A board of trustees that includes prominent educators and international business leaders governs the Foundation. The board meets regularly to review the effectiveness and quality of the Foundation's AYA program to ensure adherence to standards of excellence.

The Foundation has been designated by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) as an Exchange Visitor Program authorized to issue the Form DS-2019, which enables qualified participants to apply for a J-1 exchange visitor visa from the nearest U.S. Consulate or Embassy.

Our Mission

AYA's mission is to encourage and inspire young people to become considerate, forward-thinking citizens of the world by creating dynamic educational opportunities to share beliefs, ideologies, and values across cultures. We are committed to providing these experiences with an unrivaled commitment to the safety of our students.

The AYA Program

The AYA program has been developed for high school students ages 15 to 18, from all parts of the world, who wish to spend a semester or full academic year studying in the United States while living with an American family. AYA chooses carefully screened teenagers who have a demonstrated ability in the English language, a solid academic record, and a positive attitude to participate on our program. While participating on the AYA program, students will improve their English and share a rewarding cross-cultural exchange experience with their host families, schools, and communities.

AYA students arrive in August for the 10-month full academic year or for the 5-month fall semester program, or in January for the 5-month spring semester program.

The Goals of the AYA Program are to:

- Increase understanding of the United States and its people, culture, and history among young people all over the world
- Encourage Americans to learn more about foreign countries, cultures, and languages
- Create opportunities for cross-cultural friendships
- Provide a solid educational experience for all participants in the program
- Make participants better citizens of their countries through exchange of ideas

Key Players

AYA has several key players that make our program successful.

Students from around the world apply to participate in the AYA program. AYA students:

- Are between the ages of 15 and 18 and have a minimum of three years of English language study, a grade point average of C+ or better, and a passing score on an English language test
- Have different reasons for joining the program, but all have a desire to improve their English, curiosity about U.S. culture and customs, and the dream to be a student at an American school
- Agree to adhere to the program rules
- Are fully insured and have their own spending money
**Host families** are people of all ages, economic strata, and ethnic backgrounds. Host families have the following responsibilities:

- Provide the student with a safe and suitable home for the academic year or semester
- Welcome the student as a member of their family and encourage him/her to participate in all aspects of family life
- Provide the student with his/her own bed and place to study, either in a room he/she shares with a family member of his/her own sex and age range or in his/her own room
- Provide the student with all meals
- Assist the student with school registration
- Encourage the exchange of ideas through involvement with the AYA student and providing for the student’s exposure to the cultural and social environment of the home and community
- Provide the love and understanding a young person needs to enjoy a successful academic year in America

**High schools**, both private and public, accept our students.

- U.S. high schools embrace AYA students as members of their student bodies.
- AYA students attend the local public high school serving the district in which their host family lives or a private school in the area.
- Students enroll in full course loads and can participate in most activities such as band, sports, clubs, etc.
- School administrators determine a grade placement.
- Students must maintain a C+ GPA in all classes.

**Local Coordinators** are the community representatives of the AYA program. They are volunteers who share a belief in the value of cross-cultural exchange. Local Coordinators are responsible for:

- Screening, interviewing, and selecting safe and suitable host families
- Enrolling students in local public or private high schools
- Providing host families with a pre-arrival orientation
- Supervising and counseling families and students during the year
- Contacting students and host families monthly
- Making sure students are safe throughout the program
- Informing the National Office of any concerns
- Providing monthly student reports to AYA
- Answering questions and providing emergency assistance
- Relocating students locally to other homes if necessary
- Taking a student into his or her own home in the event of an emergency

**Second Visitors** are independent Local Coordinators or designated AYA Sponsor Representatives who are responsible for:

- Performing the required second visit to the home to verify that the home remains suitable.
- Visiting the host family home to check on the quality of the home within 30–60 days of a student’s arrival.

**Regional Directors** work full time in our National Office. They are responsible for:

- Administering the program in their specific states and overseeing the placement process within their territory of states
- Supervising Local Coordinators and communicating with overseas partners
- Supporting Local Coordinators with student disciplinary issues

**Student Support Staff** are designated AYA employees who work full time in the National Office. Their purpose is to:

- Provide outreach to our students and provide an additional outlet for students who need extra attention or need assistance in any way
- Reach out to students via quarterly student surveys and review the supervision reports submitted by each student’s Local Coordinator
- If there are any concerns about a student’s placement or behavior, reach out directly to the student to promptly address any issue

**Overseas Partners** are responsible for the initial selection and screening of our students, who come from over 35 countries from all around the world. The role of Overseas Partners is to:

- Conduct personal interviews, administer English placement exams, and submit AYA applications
- Provide a pre-departure orientation and serve as liaisons to each student’s natural parents during the program year
AYA Organizational Chart

Our key players are shown on the AYA organizational chart below. We encourage the lines of communication to flow in this order. Please remember that host families are supported locally by the Local Coordinators and on a national level by the Regional Directors.

Frequently Asked Questions

**Will I be in contact with my Local Coordinator throughout the year?**

Yes, you are encouraged to call your Local Coordinator anytime with any questions or concerns you may have. The Local Coordinator is required by AYA to be in monthly contact with you and your host family. Your Local Coordinator is required to meet with you in person at least every other month and submit monthly reports to the AYA National Office. Many Local Coordinators set up student and host family events throughout the year in order to stay in touch.

**How will I get to and from school?**

You may walk, ride a bicycle, be driven to school by a family member or a responsible friend with a driver's license, or take the school bus.

**What happens if the placement doesn’t work out?**

Your Local Coordinator will work with you and your host family to try to resolve miscommunications, unrealistic expectations, or cultural misunderstandings. Most of the time, misunderstandings can be resolved with the help of an objective mediator and open communication. If your Local Coordinator determines that things cannot be resolved, he/she will place you with another host family (within the same school district when possible). Host family changes are the last resort to solve a problem and will only be considered after all other counseling measures have been exhausted.

**Can I visit home? Can my parents come to visit?**

No, you may not return home to visit during the course of the AYA program except in the case of a family emergency. Natural parents may not visit their children during the school year, but it is possible for them to visit you and travel with you at the end of the school year. Parents may not visit sooner than April 15 and may not travel with their son or daughter if school is still in session. Natural parents must make housing arrangements separate from the host family unless explicitly invited by the host family to stay at their residence. Family members must check with the host family to ensure that the timing of a visit is convenient for them.
Why such rules are necessary. If you discuss your concerns together, their special responsibility this year. You should try to understand adults. Your host parents are concerned about you because you are in America, parents are very protective of children and young adults. What if there are too many rules?

In America, parents are very protective of children and young adults. Your host parents are concerned about you because you are their special responsibility this year. You should try to understand why such rules are necessary. If you discuss your concerns together, you may be able to reach a compromise. Remember, you are now a member of a new and different family. It is important to always communicate with each other.

What if school is too difficult?

Don't be embarrassed. We understand. The system is completely different, and you are doing everything in a second language. Most Americans can hardly believe you are doing this at all.

Most Americans love to help people. Speak up! Ask for help from your host family or your guidance counselor. Ask your classmates. Some of them would love to go over the assignments with you. Ask your teacher. In the U.S., teachers are usually available to help you early in the morning or after school. You may need to hire a tutor to help you in the beginning. Your teacher will be glad to know you are trying. If you do not ask for help, no one will know you need it!

Must I go to church or attend religious services?

In the U.S., church is often an important part of family life. Church is where people see their friends and catch up on news. Church youth groups take trips and plan recreational activities. Keep an open mind — you may have a lot of fun going to church. It is often much easier to make friends through church activities. Remember, you don't have to share the same faith in order to observe or participate in the social aspects of church or other religious services. Students are encouraged to try it, and talk to your host family and/or Local Coordinator about any concerns you may have. If you have serious reservations about attending services with your host family, alternative arrangements can be made.

What if I'm lonely in the U.S.?

People say, “In America everyone is friendly, but it’s very hard to have a friend.” It may take a while before you have good friends, and it will be up to you to take the first steps. Take a chance and invite someone to a movie, or invite a group of people to the local pizza place. Many students get homesick because they spend a lot of time focusing on what is going on back home. You will feel better if you spend more time planning activities and making friends.

Limit the time you spend on the Internet and emailing or chatting with friends from home, as it may cause you to isolate yourself.

Can I receive emergency medical treatment?

Yes. Your parents have signed a release form, and your host family has a copy. This allows your host family, Local Coordinator, or someone from AYA to make emergency decisions on your behalf.

When do I have to leave?

You must return home at the end of the school year, and no later than two weeks after the last day of school, if you have permission from your host family to stay with them during that time.

You have an open ended return ticket. Students book their own flights home with guidance from their overseas partners, the AYA National Office, and their Local Coordinator.
Students who wish to travel at the end of the year may do so in the care of a natural parent or close relative over the age of 21 years old. Students who wish to travel with family members must sign off the AYA program and return home by June 30th, when the J-1 Visa expires.

Remember…
- Don’t expect your host family to plan special travel or constant activities during your stay. They may not have the money or the time to travel.
- Don’t expect your host family to buy different food or plan a special diet for you. You’re here to fit into their lifestyle, not to make your host family adjust to your needs.
- Don’t expect your host family to be able to drive you around to special functions within the community. Most American teenagers rely on carpools (sharing rides with others), bicycling, or walking to get places.
- Do expect the unexpected. This is going to be a year filled with many surprises!

Did you know…?
- In many American families, both the mother and father work for a living?
- Boys and girls in the U.S. share chores and responsibilities at home? In some families boys help with dishes and girls take out the garbage.
- Many American families are quite conservative? Most families have specific rules about curfews, dating, quiet time, and chores.
- The typical American home has two or three bedrooms? Did you think most Americans live in big Hollywood mansions? The fact is, in many U.S. families, the children have to share bedrooms.
- In many U.S. schools, students from all ethnic backgrounds—Asian, Hispanic, European, Indian, African, and others—attend class, socialize, and work together?
- American families come from diverse backgrounds? The United States is a nation of immigrants. Our grandparents may have left Europe, Africa, Central/South America, or Asia to live in the U.S. No matter where our ancestors came from, we have a lot to tell you about American culture.
- English is not always the first language spoken in an American home? One in five Americans speaks another language in his or her home, and over 20% of Americans speak Spanish at home.
- In many parts of the country, Spanish is spoken by much of the population, including students at school.
- Many students begin the AYA program with one set of ideas about American life. These ideas may come from movies, magazines, or pop songs and may not match the reality of a typical U.S. community. Remember, the key to a successful year is keeping an open mind.
Communicating with family and friends back home

Email, phone, Skype, and social media sites can all be good ways for you to keep in touch with your family and friends back home. However, this type of communication with family and friends should be limited to a reasonable amount. You gain most by interacting with your host family and American friends. Experience has shown that limited contact with your home country will minimize homesickness and maximize your exchange experience. If your host family and Local Coordinator suspect that frequent communication with friends and family members back home may be hindering your adjustment, a counseling plan may be given to you where time on the internet or phone is limited until your adjustment improves.

Culture Shock

Even after your body has recuperated from switching time zones, there is a lot to get used to in a new country. Don't be worried if your first few weeks in the U.S. are a little unsettling. At first everything is new and unknown to you; you will be surrounded by new situations, smells, feelings, sights, sounds, values, customs, habits, and lifestyles. After the excitement quiets down, there is a feeling of strangeness and isolation. It is so common that it has been given a name... culture shock!

What are the symptoms?

Culture shock affects people in different ways. If you are experiencing any of the following feelings, you may be going through culture shock:

- Anxiety without any reason
- Feeling sleepy and exhausted all the time, even if you have had plenty of sleep
- Disorientation
- Self-doubt
- Nervousness
- Lethargy and withdrawal
- Culture shock may set in many months after arrival

What can you do about it?

Don't hide your feelings. Discuss them with your host family and friends. Your Local Coordinator is also a good person with whom to talk. Talking with people you trust is one of the best things you can do when you are feeling down. Many foreign students who arrive in the U.S. to begin the AYA program are nervous; some are outright scared. You have an idea of the U.S. from movies or television or from a vacation you had with your family. But now that you are here, life in the U.S. isn't like the movies, and you aren't on vacation—you have to live here, and that can seem frightening.

Take it easy.

Don't push yourself too hard with a busy schedule at first. Take your time to adjust slowly. Take one thing at a time, then gradually add on new activities to round out your experience.

Accept what is happening as normal.

Be patient. With time you will definitely feel better. Don't blame the U.S., your community, or yourself for feeling down. You are going through a big change, and you have a lot of new things to learn.

Be tolerant.

Even after being patient and open-minded, you may discover that there are a few customs in the United States that you just don't like. That is all right. You are here to learn and have a new experience, and you will experience both ups and downs. But be aware that Americans are a proud people. Before you criticize the U.S., think of how you would feel if someone criticized your home country and its customs. Try to remember that things are different—not better or worse.

Be open to behavior and customs that are different from yours. Always remember that your own inner qualities of independence, curiosity, and a desire to share your culture with new friends inspired you to take this trip.

Speak English at home and at school.

Most students find it difficult to jump right in and speak English. The English you learned in your classroom is slightly different from the English spoken by Americans. Ask your host family to slow down and speak more clearly, or stop them if you don't understand the words they are using.

Speaking English in school may be challenging for you at first. While you can ask your host family to slow down when they talk with you, you cannot ask your teacher to stop his or her lecture and explain words you don't understand. You will have to concentrate hard at first to understand the material, but your English will continue to improve. If you have serious problems with speaking and understanding English after you have been in the U.S. for several weeks, you should find a tutor. Usually tutors are not too expensive, and your high school can probably help you find one.

Often, students are tempted to speak with other students from their home country. Please refrain from speaking in your native language, especially around others who don't understand. It not only further isolates you, but also is considered rude behavior.
If you are visiting with a friend or someone who speaks your native language and Americans are present, you should speak English, especially in the presence of your host family. It is considered very rude to speak in a language that not everyone in the room understands.

**Ask questions at school.**

Most teachers have a question period during class when they ask students to discuss the day's subjects. Try to participate in this question and answer period. Feel free to ask any questions or request clarification you may need about the material. This will improve your English and will show your teacher you are a serious student. It is courteous to raise your hand before asking a question in class. After the teacher calls on you, ask your question. It is not necessary to stand to ask questions unless your teacher specifically instructs you to do so. American students are encouraged, and often required, to participate in class discussions. Many teachers are willing to stay after class and answer any questions you have or offer tutoring.

**Ask questions at home.**

At home with your host family, you should always feel free to ask questions when you don't understand something. You may find it difficult to know when it is your turn to speak when you are speaking with a group of people. In informal situations, it is customary to speak after you have made eye contact with the other people or during a lull in the conversation. In more formal circumstances you should say, “Excuse me…” before asking a question.

**Attitude**

There may be times when you have a bad attitude. You may question something many times or simply catch yourself being critical. As an exchange student, you may be particularly critical or angry when you're feeling homesick, and it can be a natural part of experiencing culture shock. Many students also feel frustrated and angry when their expectations for this year do not match the actual experience.

Remember, the purpose of this exchange is to experience another culture. By keeping an open mind, you will adapt to new ways and recognize the value of the exchange experience. Give yourself some space to make mistakes and do things incorrectly. Understand that it will take time to adjust to the American way of life. Be open to reevaluating and redefining your expectations based on your current experience. It's difficult to know what to expect before you arrive; once you are here, you may need to sit down and think about how you can be successful in America in your current environment. Be patient with yourself and your host family!

**Social Media**

While social media can be a great way to connect with friends and family and share your experiences, when used carelessly it can also be damaging and dangerous. As long as you are sponsored by AYA, you are a reflection of our program and an ambassador of your country. Your actions must reflect the highest standards of behavioral and program expectations. Please avoid making any posts or posting any photos of yourself that portray you in a compromising manner or that reflect poorly on your abilities to make sound decisions. Some photos and captions can be viewed as a negative representation of yourself and your role as an AYA student.

It is important to remember that what you post on these sites can be viewed by others. Posts on social media sites will follow you well beyond your time on the program and are always available for someone to search and see. Posts that you feel are “jokes” can be misinterpreted, and your posts can be perceived as inappropriate or culturally insensitive. You want to ensure that you are always represented in the best light and your character, values, and intentions are not misrepresented.

Be mindful of who you befriend on social networking sites. Their posts on your wall can also negatively impact you and can cast doubt on your ability to use good judgment in regards to the people and friends with whom you associate. They are also a reflection of you, and you can be associated with the activities these individuals participate in as well – whether those activities are good or bad.

Some other social media guidelines to follow include:

- Do not make comments about your host family, your 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 or inappropriate language
- Choose your friends carefully, and remember that your friends are often a reflection of who you are. If your friends are posting inappropriate content on your social media site, you may become associated with values and beliefs that you do not possess

Feel free to contact your Local Coordinator, your host family, or an AYA staff member if you are unsure about what is appropriate or not appropriate social media usage, or if you want more guidelines in regards to social media use.

**Food**

**Preferences**

While you may be accustomed to different foods at home, this year you will explore new foods and discover how Americans eat. It may take a little time to enjoy some foods; others you might never like. Inform your host family in the first few days if there are foods that you cannot eat due to a food allergy or your religion. Beyond this,
However, your host family will prepare their usual meals. Your host family is responsible for providing an adequate, balanced diet, which includes three meals a day. If you wish to purchase lunch at school, rather than bringing a packed lunch from home, you will be required to pay for this yourself. If you would like something special that the family does not typically eat, talk to your host family about adding this item to the grocery list every once in a while, or offer to buy it yourself as a personal snack.

Eating Habits

It’s important to remember that one of the symptoms of culture shock is a change in eating habits (eating more or less than usual). Be mindful of your eating habits and do your best 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 you to make good nutritional choices, it’s important to be flexible and not let this fear diminish your experience or your willingness to try new things. However, if you are concerned about your weight loss or gain, discuss it with your host family or your Local Coordinator.

Meal Time and Food Preparation

It is also important to recognize that every American family prepares and deals with mealtime differently. Some families eat together every night and will insist that you join them and actively participate in dinnertime conversation. Conversely, depending on your family’s lifestyle or schedule, you may be asked to warm up your own dinner once in a while, or you may find that your family eats separately due to busy schedules. Many families do not eat a formal breakfast together; students are often surprised to learn that they will be responsible for preparing their own breakfast (e.g., making toast or grabbing a bowl of cereal) before they head out to school. There is no typical American family, and students should be flexible and help out when necessary. Children often help clean up the table and dishes after a meal.

Friends

Making friends is not easy. It takes time, and it requires being outgoing and friendly. Exchange students sometimes stand and wait—wait for someone to sit with them at lunch, to invite them to the movies, to participate in homecoming preparations. This is generally not a realistic expectation—in most cases, you, as the exchange student, will need to take the first step in initiating friendships. Here are some tips on how to take the first step:

- Join school clubs or sports teams; they are great ways to meet different groups of people.
- Ask your school guidance counselor to assign you a buddy for your first week or so on the program. This is a great way to connect with someone and be shown around the school so you can become more comfortable with the grounds and people.
- In the school cafeteria (lunch room), ask a student or small group of students if you can sit with them at lunch. They will probably say yes, and this is a great way to meet new friends.
- Smile and show your friendliness. Believe it or not, American students are just as nervous to meet you as you are to meet them!
- Take the first step and ask other students about (positive!) things you noticed about their culture. Let them know that you would like to learn more about it.
- Attend as many school events (plays, musicals, sporting events) as you can. It’s a great way to involve yourself in your school community. A lot of American teenagers’ social lives revolve around high school events and activities.
- Try to remember that the friendships you form in America will be different from the ones you have back home. Adjusting your expectations can help prevent you from feeling disappointed about the friendships you create while on the program and help you appreciate the differences in these friendship dynamics.

You also need to remember that some American high school students may not be very informed about what’s going on in other parts of the world. Some students may not express appreciation for different cultures due to lack of exposure. You may be shocked by some of the questions your new friends ask. Remember, one of the reasons U.S. high schools enroll exchange students is to enhance some of the questions your new friends ask. Remember, one of the
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Social Life

Most AYA students are somewhat shy when they begin school, and it might not be easy to meet new people or make friends during the first few weeks of class. This shyness is completely understandable and comes from the culture shock you may be experiencing.

Try not to spend time exclusively with other foreign students, especially if you share the same native language. If you try to meet a lot of American students, you will develop a wide circle of friends in your high school. It will be easier to make close, meaningful friendships later if you reach out during the first few weeks. Also, get involved in school activities. It is easier to meet people and make friends if you share a common interest in a club or sport. When invited to social events, make sure that you provide your host family with the names and phone numbers of the friends who will be hosting the get-togethers and confirm that there will be parental supervision. If your host family requires any more information prior to giving permission for you to attend the event, please provide them with this information in a timely and respectful manner.

Group Outings

This custom is popular throughout the world. Rather than going out with one particular person, a whole group of friends decides
to do something together—see a movie, go swimming, or go out to eat. Often, it’s not necessary to wait for a specific invitation; you may go if you want. Just ask where the group is going, what time they will be there, and if you may come along. Don’t be shy!

Dates

There are all kinds of dates—romantic dates and casual dates between friends. Usually a date is a specific invitation to go somewhere with one or more people with the time, day, and place set in advance. You are free to accept or decline a date as you want, but it is rude to break a date once you have accepted. During a date, both people may share the expenses (sometimes called “going Dutch” or “Dutch treat”), or the person doing the inviting may pay. It is important that you discuss casual dating with your host family prior to accepting or planning any dates. Your host family may have rules that prohibit or limit one-on-one dating.

AYA highly discourages our students from entering into a relationship or having a “boyfriend” or “girlfriend” while on the program. Dating is not why you came on this program—getting involved in a relationship often hinders or derails an otherwise positive experience by narrowing your focus, your group of friends, and your ability to experience a wide range of friends and activities.

Sex

Engaging in sexual activity is highly discouraged, and sexual intercourse is prohibited while you are on the AYA program. AYA encourages you to act responsibly and conservatively in regards to sex and dating. Becoming romantically involved is not part of this experience and should not be your focus or priority. Engaging in sexual behavior may result in disciplinary action, including early dismissal from the program. U.S. law also states that persons are not permitted to engage in sexual activity with any minor (persons 18 years or younger). Likewise, minors may not engage in sexual activity with anyone who is 18 years or older. Even when consensual, a person having sex with a minor may be subject to legal prosecution.

Parties

Parties can be formal or informal. They usually are held at a student’s home or through a school-run activity. If you want to invite a friend along, such as another student on the program or your host brother or sister, ask your party host beforehand. Be proactive in using sound judgment as you attend both school-sponsored events and events you are invited to by friends. You may find yourself presented with situations that can be potentially risky and dangerous. These situations include, but are not limited to, underage drinking, drug use, getting into a car with a drunk driver, etc. If you find yourself at a party where alcohol and/or drugs are being used, you should leave the party immediately. Remember that the use of alcohol or illegal substances is not allowed and will result in immediate disqualification from the program.

Curfew

Most teenagers in the U.S. have a “curfew,” which is a specific time in the evening when they must return home. Teenagers can get into a lot of trouble with their parents if they disregard their curfews. Ask your host family what time you should be home in the evening, and obey them. Find out if your date or friend has a curfew and be sure that he/she is home at or before that time.

Loss of Independence

You may find that you are more limited in what you can and cannot do socially with your friends while you are in the U.S. Americans parents and cultural norms related to teenaged behavior may be more conservative than you are used to in your home country. You will be expected to ask permission to go anywhere and check in frequently as well as when plans change. Many students take this close monitoring as a sign that their host family doesn’t trust them, but this is not the case. Your host family has been tasked with the responsibility of keeping you safe, and that is a responsibility that they should and do take very seriously. It is critical that you follow your host family’s rules at all times and ensure that they approve of and know where you are at all times.

Likewise, you may find that you have to rely on your host family and friends to go anywhere. Most students are placed in rural America, where there is limited or no public transportation. This may be frustrating for a student who is used to hopping on a bus or metro in their home country. It is important to understand that this is the norm in the U.S. and that you will be required to plan in advance and arrange carpools and rides when you want to go somewhere. It is important to give your host family proper notice when you will need a ride and to ask them for permission. Never assume that someone is going to be able to give you a ride; due to busy schedules and lifestyles, most parents and teenagers need at least 48 hours’ notice.

High School

Successful participation at an American high school is every bit as important as being part of an American family. You will find that the high school experience is an exciting part of the exchange year as well. You will discover a lot about the United States and about yourself at school. Going to a new school is difficult for any teenager. Attending a new school in a foreign country, communicating all day in a foreign language, and experiencing a dozen different ways of doing things can be overwhelming. Spend a few hours with your host family visiting the school before it opens, if possible. Introduce yourself to the principal and to the appointed guidance counselor. The guidance counselor may be a support for you during the year.

It is important to take school seriously. This year may not count for academic credit at home, but the benefits will be far greater if you make an effort to do well at school. AYA requires that you achieve at least a “C+” average in all classes, and that you demonstrate a positive attitude in school as well. If you are expelled from school, you will be disqualified from the AYA program. If you receive a suspension, AYA will evaluate the situation and take appropriate disciplinary action. Please contact your Local Coordinator if you are experiencing any problems at school.

AYA does not guarantee grade assignment, a receipt of a diploma, or participation in graduation ceremonies to any of its students.
You or your host family should not pressure a school to place you in a particular grade or to allow you to graduate. You can be issued a warning or be placed on probation if you continually ask school personnel to allow you to graduate.

Convalidation: Attention students from Brazil, Italy, and Spain*
Please take appropriate measures to ensure the transfer of your academic credits. Please contact your overseas sponsoring organization for a copy of your convalidation procedure that will pertain to your country’s requirements. It is your responsibility, not the responsibility of your LC or AYA, to ensure this process is completed before you leave the United States. AYA does not guarantee convalidation. If you withdraw from or are dismissed from the program early, you may not be able to convalidate your transcripts.

Volunteerism
We encourage students to get involved and volunteer their time helping out a community service organization. It is a special way to give back to your host community and say “thank you” for the support and encouragement you receive. Ask your Local Coordinator or guidance counselor for suggestions. This is also a great way to make friends.

Join the AYA Student Advocates for Global Awareness (SAGA)!
AYA’s mission is to encourage students to become considerate and forward-thinking citizens of the world. Student Advocates for Global Awareness (SAGA) is an AYA community that students are encouraged to join to advance our mission by promoting the AYA program in your community through presentations to community and school groups, and active participation in local volunteer community service activities.

Students who join SAGA will be required to perform a minimum number of community service activities and/or presentations. In addition to being part of a fantastic mission, students will benefit from building their résumés, honing strong leadership and presentation skills, and accruing community service hours. Qualified students will earn a certificate of completion at the end of the semester or year, and students who make a designated number of presentations have the opportunity to earn special prizes and awards.

AYA will send out registration information and requirements via email at the beginning of each semester.

Illness, Medical Emergencies, and Insurance
If you become ill with more than a simple cold, your host family should advise your Local Coordinator and make sure you receive appropriate medical treatment. You are covered by insurance and will be able to receive urgent care at many hospitals and urgent care facilities. Due to the AYA medical release form, your host family and/or Local Coordinator will be able to sign off on any urgent care that you may need.

You should carefully review your insurance plan and be familiar with co-pay and claims procedures in order to ensure you are making sound decisions about your medical care. AYA advises that you and your family work with your insurance provider to identify in-network physicians and urgent care centers whenever possible. Emergency room visits should be reserved for true emergencies only. If you go to a doctor or urgent care network that is not in your insurance network, you may have to pay additional charges.

In the event of a serious accident or illness, AYA will contact your natural parents immediately. In rare cases, students may need to return home to receive follow-up care or surgery in their home countries and be in the care of their natural parents.

Host parents are not financially responsible for medical treatment. Please give your natural family’s contact information on all hospital documents you complete.

Insurance
All AYA students are covered by insurance. The majority of AYA students are covered by CareMed Insurance. For the few students who are not under the CareMed policy, you will need to refer to the private insurance information provided to you by your home country organization. The CareMed policy provides unlimited medical benefits for covered injuries or illnesses with no per occurrence or annual deductible. Some services carry sub-limits, and there is a $250 Non-Emergent Emergency Room Illness deductible.

The CareMed insurance policy covers: required treatment by a physician or surgeon, confinement in an infirmary or hospital, services of a registered nurse, x-rays, ambulance service, or any other services and supplies or medicines prescribed by a physician.

Policy Sub-Limits Include:
- Dental Treatment for relief of Pain is covered up to $500
- Dental Treatment in Case of an Accident is covered up to $1,500
- Mental/Nervous Disorders are covered up to $500
- Physical Therapy is covered up to $750
- X-Ray and Lab Services are covered up to $1,000
- CAT Scans and MRIs are covered up to $1,000

The policy does not cover the following:
- Pre-existing Conditions
- Routine Physicals
- Immunizations
- Sports Examinations
- Extreme Sports

The following are some examples of activities that are not covered:
- Boxing, combat sports, aerial, sports, rock climbing, hang gliding, parachuting, bungee jumping, horseracing, scuba diving, white water rafting, jet skiing, water skiing, heli-skiing.

It is your responsibility to know what your plan covers or excludes.
If you are in doubt about whether an activity is covered by your insurance, contact AYA during business hours or contact your insurance provider directly for clarification.

Your AYA ID card will have the policy number and contact number on the back. In case of medical emergency, you may also call the AYA emergency number.

Submitting Claims
To receive reimbursement for medical expenses incurred because of illness or an accident, you must complete and sign the Medical Claim Form attached to the insurance brochure and indicate whether the doctor/hospital has been paid. Itemized bills or receipts for all amounts being claimed should also be attached to the form. If reimbursement is approved, it will be made to the provider of the service unless the receipt or bill is noted as having been paid.

If payment is to be made to the service provider, the provider's name, address, zip code, telephone number, and taxpayer identification number must be included on the bill or receipt.

The form and all attachments should be submitted via mail or e-mail to:

**CareMed Claims**
CISI Claim Department
1 High Ridge Park
Stamford, CT 06905
Email: claimhelp@culturalinsurance.com

After you submit your first claim, subsequent claims can be made by mailing medical bills to the Claims Department of CISI/CareMed in Stamford, Connecticut. When you submit medical claims, your name, ID number, and host family address should be clearly written on all correspondence and bills sent to the Claims Department.

If doctors and medical facilities will not wait for payment for services from the insurance company, you will have to pay these bills directly. You must send the bills and proof of payment to the Claims Department of CISI/CareMed in Stamford, Connecticut, for payment, indicating that payment should be made directly to you. Again, your name, ID number, and host family address should be clearly written on all correspondence and bills sent to the Claims Department. Questions can be directed to CareMed at (800) 303-8120.

Students who are not covered by CareMed Insurance will have received information regarding their policy and details of their coverage from the Overseas Partner prior to departing from their home country.

Lost Passport
Carefully guard your passport, visa, and DS-2019 form while you are in the U.S. Keep a copy of your passport separate from the original. You won’t be allowed to return home without your passport, and replacing it could take weeks and will be at your own expense. If you do lose your passport, you will need to get copies of your passport details, such as the passport number, date, and place of issue, and visa details from your natural family in your home country. Once you have your passport details, contact your country’s nearest Embassy, Consulate, or High Commission. They should then be able to issue you a new passport. If you cannot obtain your passport details, your embassy will have to establish your identity, which could take several weeks.

Money and Banking
You may arrive with spending money for the year or receive monthly or periodic allowances from your natural parents. When you arrive, check with your host family to determine which local banks can receive international cable transfers of money from overseas banks, and the standard procedure for clearing international checks or money orders. Not all banks are equipped to provide these services, and procedures vary from bank to bank. Also confirm bank regulations for minors opening a checking account in their name only. Your money should never be placed in the host family’s account. Soon after you arrive, ask your host family or LC to help you open an account. As a safety precaution, you should never carry large sums of cash around, and keep all cash locked up in a safe or bank account. You should not give your P.I.N. numbers for any credit cards or money cards to anyone. You are not allowed to give or lend your host family money for any reason; likewise, you should not borrow or ask for money from your host family.

You should create a financial plan for the year and a monthly budget. Clearly discuss with your host family what you will be expected to be responsible for regarding trips and weekly entertainment. If your funds seem to be running low, please inform your natural parents that you need additional funds. If you bring traveler’s checks with you, make sure you keep a separate note of the serial numbers, amounts, and the date you cashed them, in case they are lost or stolen. With this information, you may be able to obtain a refund.

If you bring over a credit card, you should keep the account number and expiration date of your credit card in a secure place. In the event that your card is lost or stolen, this will help you cancel your old card and receive a new one.

Phone Calls
The easiest way to make phone calls in the U.S., particularly when you are making a phone call home, is to use either a credit card or a phone card.

The main distinction between the phone system in the U.S. and those elsewhere is that they use a number and letter system. Many phone numbers will use words, for example, 1.800.72.PIZZA. All phone numbers have an area code (3 digits), an exchange code (3 digits), and a number (4 digits). Examples of toll-free exchanges in the U.S. are 1-800, 1-888, 1-877, and 1-866. Do not call 1-900 numbers which, may cost you upwards of $5 per minute.
International Calls

When calling home, remember that there is a time difference. The U.S. has four time zones (Eastern, Central, Mountain, and Pacific), depending on where you are. Make sure you take this into account or you’ll risk waking up the person you are calling! If you intend to pay for the call yourself, follow the instructions above, remembering you will need the international dialing code: 011 + your country code + local code (minus the zero) + the number. If you’re making a collect call, follow the guidelines above, remembering you also need the international dialing code.

Important note: A record of every call that is made from a private phone will appear on the phone bill. If you’re making a phone call from a friend’s phone or your host family’s phone, make sure you pay them for the call.

Phone cards are an easy solution to long-distance calling. Most convenience and grocery stores carry phone cards, which can be purchased for a small amount and recharged at a later date. Using a phone card will ensure that you don’t incur any charges on your host family’s phone bill.

If you have a cell phone, you may be able to call or text with your natural family if you have an international plan. Remember that these plans may be costly, and you will be responsible for paying for any calls you make using your cell phone, or a cell phone provided to you by your host family. Make sure you limit cell phone calls and are educated about how much each call or text is costing you, your natural family, or your host family. It is also important to note that just because you have your own cell phone, that does not mean that you may talk or text with friends and family any time you wish; be mindful of your host family’s rules regarding cell phone usage and texting, and be aware that you may receive a disciplinary notice if you are not abiding by their guidelines.

Student Travel

Traveling During the Program

The primary purpose of the AYA program is to learn about American culture through a home stay and high school experience while sharing your own culture with others. Students will be expected to attend classes regularly and become a part of their family. The AYA program is not a travel program for you to see the famous sights and landmarks of the U.S. Please do not expect your host family to take you to America’s big cities and national parks. They may take you to local tourist spots, but that may only be a few times during the year. Further travel can always be done after the program ends when you return to visit your host family and the friends you made while on the program. Traveling is not allowed while school is in session; one of your first priorities on the AYA program is to attend school daily. There are a few school breaks throughout the academic year, and this is when you and your host family should plan any vacations. When the opportunity to travel does arise, AYA allows you to travel with your host family or Local Coordinator without any special restrictions other than informing the AYA office of your whereabouts. However, if you plan a trip with someone other than your host parents or LC, AYA will require written permission from your natural parents, your overseas partner, and AYA. It is your responsibility to contact your Local Coordinator at least two weeks in advance whenever you want to travel without your host parents in order to complete an Independent Student Travel form. A school-sponsored overnight trip will also require an independent travel form. Please note, under no circumstances will the AYA office permit trips taken without any adult supervision (someone who is 21 years or older). Final approval for all independent travel is granted by AYA.

Traveling Abroad

If you plan to travel outside the U.S. with your host family while on the exchange program, you will need to submit an Independent Student Travel form signed by your parents at least four weeks prior to your trip. It is your responsibility to obtain the necessary information and documents before traveling. You should allow a minimum of six weeks to complete these requirements. If you do not obtain the appropriate paperwork, there is a possibility that you will not be allowed to leave the U.S. or re-enter the U.S. Here are the initial steps to complete:

- You should check your J-1 Visa inside your 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 you to successfully re-enter the United States.
- You or your host family should contact the nearest consulate of the country to which you are traveling to find out if additional documents (i.e. visa) are required for travel.
- You must send your original DS-2019 form via certified or traceable mail to the AYA office for signature at least 4 weeks prior to the intended travel date.
• You should never relinquish your DS-2019 form and should always bring this with you along with all necessary paperwork when traveling outside the U.S. You will not be permitted to travel outside the U.S. without your endorsed original DS-2019 form.

• You should make copies of all documents before turning them over to a consulate or mailing them.

Please be aware that these steps are only the basic requirements for traveling abroad. You are responsible for determining all requirements and cost for your travel. There may be times when you are denied access to another country. This decision is solely at the discretion of each country’s consulate. 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 with any other form of travel.

Important: If you have extended your visa from a semester to a full year, you CANNOT travel outside the U.S. for any reason. You will NOT be allowed back into the U.S., even if you possess a new “extended” DS-2019.

Contact with Visitors from Your Home Country

It is important to start the bonding process with your host family early so that you can better acclimate to your new surroundings. One way to accomplish this is by limiting communication with your natural family and friends back in your home country. Please try to limit the number of times you contact those back home to once a week or less after the initial settling in period. Your natural parents and/or friends may want to visit you during your stay in the U.S. It is very important to understand that AYA and the overseas partner do not allow visits from family and friends back home during most of the program. The reason is simple: Our experience has shown us that visits from home can be very disruptive to your year in America, can lead to difficulties with adjusting, and can result in extreme homesickness and possibly an early return home. Even students who have adapted well to their homestay are at increased risk of experiencing homesickness or adjustment issues after a visit from family or friends from home. If your natural family or friends intend to visit you while you are in the U.S., please arrange for this to occur at the end of the school year, after April 15. Additionally, you must seek permission from your host family well in advance of the visit (and before any tickets or arrangements are booked) to make sure they are comfortable with the visit.

AYA National Office Support

A dedicated, professional staff in Stamford, Connecticut, supports you, your host family, and your Local Coordinator. The AYA office is comprised of a caring team of professionals who ensure that you receive the support you need and that you have access to AYA 24 hours each day. If you are experiencing a problem or conflict with your host family or Local Coordinator, call the AYA office at 800.322.4678 and ask for the supervising Regional Director assigned to your state. Your supervising Regional Director can:

• Talk with you, your host family, and your Local Coordinator
• Communicate with the office in your home country
• Get information to natural parents
• Help you find a solution
• Please do not wait until you have a severe problem before calling your Local Coordinator or the AYA office.

Many times, we hear from host families or students at the end of the year about the many problems they experienced all year long. Don’t hesitate to inform your Local Coordinator or the AYA office of anything that may concern you. If we don’t know about it, we can’t help you!
Adjusting to Life in America

Great Expectations

Many of the issues you may encounter will be a result of unmet expectations. You will need to determine whether those expectations are realistic or not, with guidance from your host family, Local Coordinator, and the AYA support team. Open communication and problem-solving will help you through difficult times. Successful placements are not always the ones that are problem-free. The deep connection and goodwill that develop through adaptation, negotiation, and respect of cultural differences will strengthen your relationship with your host family and help you to grow as an individual.

It is important to remember that you are not the only one with expectations for this year. Your host family also has their own expectations for you, and about how you will fit into their family this year. They will also need to communicate and make adjustments when their expectations are not met.

Unmet expectations for both you and your host family can create frustration, which over time can create long-standing issues. By setting up clear expectations, boundaries, and guidelines and listening to each other, you and your host family can usually reconcile these differences. Frustrations, disappointments, and adjustments are part of the process of learning to live together. Talking and open communication are the keys to understanding.

Below are some of the most typical expectations that are sometimes not met by either you or your host family and steps you might take to adjust expectations and resolve these concerns.

The location you are placed in may be smaller and more rural than you are accustomed to or expected. Effective ways to resolve this issue are:

- Ask your family what activities they like to participate in around their town.
- Involve yourself in school activities and events. In small towns, and with most American teens, a lot of the social activities revolve around local high schools.

Your host family may have more rules that you are accustomed to. For example, many American families expect their own children to participate in household chores and abide by a curfew. Effective ways to deal with this adjustment include:

- Remind yourself that as a member of your host family, you will be treated as such. This includes the responsibility to participate in chores, if asked to by your host family, as well as following host family rules. These rules are not just for you to follow; they also apply to other members of the household.
- Ask your host family if they can develop a rotating chore schedule. This is a good way to feel involved in the decision-making process.
- Host family rules such as curfews or asking for permission before going out are essentially cultural differences that will most likely not be negotiated and are easy to follow so long as you ask, tell, and stay on time. Remember: your safety is a top priority for your host family and AYA. Abiding by these rules is a way that we can all help to ensure your safety while on the program.

Sharing a double placement with another AYA student may bring about the same normal teen sibling rivalries. Effective ways to resolve this issue are to:

- Talk to your host family, Local Coordinator, or an AYA student support staff member about some of your concerns. They may be able to provide you and your host brother/sister with ways to improve your relationship and/or decrease the number of issues you are having.
- Try to remind yourself of all the positives of living with another person. You and your host sibling are learning a lot about communication, sharing, and respecting a different culture and lifestyle.

The food your host family eats may not be as healthy as the food you are accustomed to. For example, if you are a vegetarian, you may find it difficult to find foods in your host family’s home that you like and are able to eat. Effective ways to handle this adjustment include:

- Communicate with your host family about what your diet normally consists of back home and work with them to find compromises and ways to include your meals of choice into their daily diet if possible.
- If you are accustomed to eating certain snacks, take it upon yourself to purchase these snacks. Your host family is responsible for providing you with three meals a day. This includes food for a lunch to pack from home. If you purchase lunch at school, that is at your expense. They are not responsible for providing you with your favorite snacks.
- Offer to cook occasionally for your host family—or provide your host family with some recipes that you enjoy back home. This is a great way to expose your host family to an aspect of your culture while also bringing a taste of home to your American experience.
The activities that your host family participates in do not interest you, and you choose not to participate in them. Your host family may see this as you isolating yourself and may be disappointed or hurt by your actions. Effective ways to prevent this from happening include:

- Be open-minded to these activities. Your host family already views you as being open to new things because you are an exchange student. This expectation will spill over into you being open to participating in their family activities.

- A large part of building a relationship with your host family is to be as involved as you can in their daily lives. They are giving you the opportunity to be a part of their family traditions; for example, if they spend one night a week playing board games, join in!

- Suggest activities that you and your natural family normally do at home. Remember, this is an exchange program, and your host family is also expecting to learn from you, your culture, and your family traditions as well!

You are experiencing some homesickness and spending a lot of time on the computer or phone speaking to your natural family and friends with the hope that it will ease the homesickness. Your host family could see this as you not wanting to spend time with them, instead preferring to spend your free time in your room and on the computer. Effective ways to prevent this from happening include:

- Limit communication with natural family and friends during this time. Believe it or not, limiting contact with family and friends will actually help you get over homesickness more quickly. Constantly checking in with the people back home will only intensify your homesickness and concern that you are missing out on something in your home country. Likewise, limiting contact can also help your host family recognize that you are not intentionally alienating them and shows that you have an interest in getting to know them.

- Be open with your host family and Local Coordinator about your feelings. Expressing these feelings will not only help you, but also prevent your host family from misinterpreting your homesickness and thinking that you are deliberately isolating yourself.

• Your host family will also be able to suggest activities or family outings that will help take your mind off your homesickness.

**Problem-Solving**

The only way to solve problems is to talk about them. Open communication is the key. It is often difficult for you to tell your host family that something is bothering you. You may be afraid that you will hurt their feelings. However, think of how much worse they will feel if you let these little problems grow and finally decide that you cannot live with them any longer or vice versa. Take the opportunity to talk about problems.

If you don't talk about a problem, no one knows it's there. If you don't talk about a problem, you can't solve it.

Begin by saying you have a small problem you would like to discuss. You probably will find your host family very willing to listen and help in whatever way they can.

Many students' first instinct is to call their parents at home. It is important to follow the chain of communications on page 4. Your host family, Local Coordinator, and AYA can help you solve the problem more quickly than your natural parents, who are far away; they will only worry about you. The longer you wait to talk to your host family, Local Coordinator, and AYA, the more you may prolong your problem.

If you feel like you can't talk to your host family about your concern, contact your Local Coordinator immediately—he or she is there to assist you in resolving these problems, no matter how big or small. If for any reason you cannot reach your LC or do not feel comfortable discussing a particular issue with him/her, you can always call your Regional Director or a member of the AYA student support team. We are here to help you and guide you through this experience.
When you have a problem

1. Talk with your host family FIRST. If it’s not solved,
2. Call your Local Coordinator, who can:
   » Listen
   » Advise
   » Talk to your host family
   » Arrange a student/family conference or mediation
   » Call the AYA National Office

Still have problems?

3. Call the AYA National Office at 1.800.322.4678. Please have your student ID number or the name of your LC to give to our office staff. You can request to speak to your Regional Director or the AYA Student Support Administrator. If you must leave a message, please leave your first and last name, what state you are calling from, and the best phone number to reach you. You can also email the AYA student support team anytime at: studentsupport@aifs.org

The AYA office will:

Listen to your concerns and help you work through them. AYA support staff will help counsel you and will reach out to all appropriate parties, including your sponsoring organization in your home country, who will also update your parents.

Between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time):
Ask to speak with your Regional Director, who is responsible for the state in which you live.

After office hours:

If it is an emergency (something that cannot wait until the next business day, such as a medical emergency), please follow the directions on the recorded phone message and leave your full name, student ID #, telephone number with area code, and the reason for your call with the Emergency Service. An AYA staff member will then call you.

If it’s not an emergency, leave your name and full phone number, and your Regional Director will contact you when office hours resume.

Remember… Your host family is there for you to talk over any problems, and the AYA organization is only a free phone call away! There is always someone here to speak with, 24 hours a day.

What happens after I report a problem?

If you and your family are experiencing any of the challenges described above the following steps will be taken to begin the counseling process.

Mediation: Your Local Coordinator will schedule a meeting to discuss any issues affecting your placement. This meeting can be requested by you, your host family, your Local Coordinator, or the AYA National Office if appropriate. The purpose of mediation is to allow all parties to come together and have the opportunity to speak freely, without fear or judgment, about their concerns. The Local Coordinator will be there to act as a mediator and objective third party; he or she will ensure that both sides have the opportunity to be heard and will summarize the issues and keep the conversation respectful and productive.

Action Plan: Once you and your host family have had the opportunity to honestly communicate with each other, your LC will help you and your family come up with an action plan to address the issues. You will each come up with concrete suggestions on specific actions that each of you will take to improve the situation and avoid having it happen again.

Follow-up plan: Your Local Coordinator will establish a follow-up plan to check on you and your host family after a certain date. This will allow you and your host family time to implement the necessary changes and provide feedback when your LC checks in again. If problems persist, you may need to sit down again and come up with alternate solutions.

It is important to keep in mind that during the counseling process, all parties must be respectful and courteous of one another. Remember, your host family also had expectations and may be disappointed or frustrated by this experience as well.

Host Family Changes

Only when all other corrective counseling measures have failed will a host family change be considered. If, after going through the appropriate counseling steps, AYA feels that there is an irreconcilable difference or a genuine compatibility issue, your Local Coordinator will make every effort to place you with a new family within the same community and high school. Only rarely will a student be required to move to a new school or state.

You are expected to make a concerted effort to adjust to your host family. Every host family has been hand-selected by your Local Coordinator. The family goes through a very rigorous application process and interview, just as you have, to participate in the AYA program. Often times, host families have made many changes in their homes to welcome an exchange student for an academic year or semester. You will not be moved based on simple dislike of your location, style of housing, or host family. You must adjust to the community and high school that you are originally placed in. The majority of AYA students are placed in rural communities and/or small high schools. Unless there is a safety concern, you are expected to stay with your assigned host family. You may not change host families at will or without permission from the AYA National Office; this is a safety precaution to ensure that AYA knows where you are at all times and has appropriately screened and vetted your host family.

Your Health

Your health and wellbeing are paramount to AYA. We expect you to take good care of yourself and make responsible decisions about your health, including proper diet and nutrition, responsibly taking any medications that you are prescribed and promptly reporting...
any health concerns to your host family, Local Coordinator or AYA student support team member.

**If you get sick**

If you get sick and need to see a doctor, your host family or LC is responsible for making sure you are seen by a doctor or health care professional as soon as possible. It is imperative that you report any unusual health symptoms as soon as you begin experiencing them so that you can be evaluated promptly and treated accordingly. All AYA students are required to carry full insurance, and will be able to see a wide range of doctors in their communities. In the rare case of an extreme emergency, AYA strongly suggests that students go straight to the nearest Emergency room.

In rare instances, students may experience an illness or injury that requires extended, regular follow up care (e.g. weekly check-ups, multiple physical therapy sessions). In some cases, AYA may recommend that students return home early to receive the additional treatment and care under the supervision of their natural family.

**If you are feeling down**

Feeling sad or anxious is a normal part of adjusting to life in a new country with a new family (as well as a normal part of being a teenager!). While it is completely normal to experience feelings of sadness, loneliness or anxiety, it is important that you discuss your feelings with your host family, your Local Coordinator or an AYA student support team member. Your AYA support team has a lot of experience helping students through homesickness, culture shock and coping with challenges while on-program. We can help support you through these challenges so that you can enjoy a positive and rewarding experience. Students will experience highs and lows throughout the program and communication is the key to getting through them.

If you are experiencing more lows than highs, or persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety or depression that are not associated with homesickness or your adjustment, it is important for you to tell someone. These feelings can be overwhelming and difficult to process or talk about, but with support from AYA or a trusted professional, you can get through it. Talk to your host family, your Local Coordinator, an AYA team member or anyone you trust about how you are feeling – we are here to listen!

**Self-Harm**

For some students, feelings of sadness may become so overwhelming that they may consider harming themselves. Some students have heard that cutting themselves or self-inflicting injury may help reduce the pain or anxiety associated with these negative feelings. This is not a healthy or sustainable way to cope with these feelings.

If you or anyone you know has or is thinking about hurting themselves in anyway, it is imperative that you tell a trusted adult how you are feeling. As a program we are here to support you, guide you and help you navigate these difficult feelings. We have experience in counseling students and will make sure that you get the support and help you need to feel better.
Your upcoming semester or year will be filled with exciting new experiences, amazing memories, and many different feelings throughout the year. As you adjust, assimilate, and acclimate, you will experience high points and low points, all of which are perfectly natural and part of the experience. Here we have outlined what to expect each month. Remember, this is just a general timeline; everyone will have a unique experience, and some students may take longer to adjust than others.

**August**

Most of you will have arrived this month – expect to experience jet lag and feel a little overwhelmed, as you’ve had many long days of travel and may have experienced an extensive AYA Orientation. (If you did not attend this orientation, your Local Coordinator will provide you with an orientation upon your arrival.) You may find the following topics helpful in the month of August as you and your host family adjust to life together and you start school:

- **Registering for high school:** Feel free to ask your host family or Local Coordinator to accompany you to registration. Your high school has already received your full application, which includes your immunization/vaccination records as well as high school transcript. However, on registration day, make sure you also bring this information with you.

- **First Day of School:** Feel free to ask a guidance counselor to assign you a buddy for the day to show you around school or to sit with you at lunch (some schools already do this without asking). It’s important to get involved in activities early on in order to make friends and adjust more quickly. When choosing classes, make sure you are taking an English, American history, math, and science course and maintain a full academic course load. Use school resources (guidance counselor, school website) to find a list of activities in which you might like to participate.

- **House Rules and Expectations:** You and your host family should discuss host family rules and expectations early on (fill out the expectations worksheet together and display it in the home) and review AYA rules and program policies in the AYA handbook. Your Local Coordinator can be present during this as well so that they can review their own expectations with you and the host family.

- **Adjustment:** Many of you will go through feelings of homesickness when you arrive and experience highs and lows in your first few weeks or months. Your host family will also be adjusting as they take on a new family member. It’s important to remember that as long as you keep an open channel of communication with everyone about your possible homesickness or other emotions or feelings you are experiencing, you can work through it together effectively and positively.

- **AYA Insurance Info:** You will receive your insurance information prior to departing to America. Please go over all insurance information with your host family and Local Coordinator when you arrive so that you are prepared in case of emergency. IMPORTANT NOTE: If you ever need medical care, avoid the hospital emergency room if your illness or injury is not serious. Go to an urgent care clinic or schedule an appointment with a local doctor. Contact the doctor’s office in advance to ensure that they are in-network; otherwise, you may be required to pay additional charges at your own expense. Present the insurance card and contact AYA if you have any issues.

- **AYA Support:** Your Local Coordinator is your first point of contact if you have any questions or issues during the exchange program. You also have a Regional Director at the AYA main office in Stamford, Connecticut, who is available to resolve issues or answer questions. AYA also has a Student Support Administrator, who will be sending you four surveys throughout the year and is available to provide you with additional support or guidance throughout your stay in the U.S.

**September**

September is a key month for you and your host family—school starts, activities begin, and you will begin settling into your new home life! There will still be some adjustments occurring as you begin to make friends and have to adhere to your host family rules. You may find that September is filled with ups and downs as you begin to make friends, but may still miss the interaction with your friends and family back home. Here are some important topics for September.

- **Guidelines and Expectations:** Please review the Expectations Worksheet about household rules with your host family throughout the month of September. Refer to this worksheet and the Student Handbook if any questions or concerns arise. The Expectations Worksheet is a great way to set a positive stage and open communication channels for the rest of the program.
- **Getting Involved:** Ask your Local Coordinator and/or host family to help you get involved in after-school activities in order to meet people with common interests and make friends. Check to see if your high school allows exchange students to participate on sports teams. Please be reminded that you are not guaranteed the ability to participate in sports; it is dependent on school/district rules and regulations. Please reach out to your guidance counselor to review the options of clubs at school; pick one that interests you and go to their first meeting. You can also ask for guidance on how to get involved with volunteering in your community. This will help occupy your time in order to move past feeling homesick.

- **Academics:** Academics are a vital part of the program, and you should take homework assignments, attendance, and school participation seriously. Please contact your host family, Local Coordinator, or Regional Director if you feel that you are having difficulty maintaining the required C+ average in every class. You may benefit from tutoring, and your LC, host family, and AYA can help facilitate this. Some schools offer free after-school tutoring. Your Regional Director and Local Coordinator can also assist with setting up a paid tutor for you (paid for by you) if free tutoring is not made available by the high school. It is important that you get off to a good start and have a positive attitude when it comes to academics.

- **High School Exchange Student “Buddy”:** Ask your guidance office, or your host family, to inquire on your behalf if there is an American student who would be willing to be your “buddy” for the first few days of school. This would include showing you around school, introducing you to new people, and telling you about school clubs, activities, etc. This is a great way to help you adjust to your new school environment and make friends, which can sometimes be difficult, especially if you are not accustomed to a large (or small) student body.

- **Cultural Adjustment:** You will likely be experiencing culture shock during this adjustment period. Culture shock can be expressed through a variety of different emotions depending on the individual. Some of you may feel excited to start something new and happy about this new experience when you first arrive, but after a few weeks of living in the U.S. and attending an American high school, you may start to feel anxious, shy, lonely, or hesitant to get involved. Express these feelings to your host family and your Local Coordinator so they will pass. It is important to be open-minded about this experience, friendly with others, and willing to try new things. Remind yourself of the reasons for coming on the program and that you are not alone and/or visit relatives/friends while on the program.

- **Support Staff Contact with Students:** All students are assigned a Regional Director from the AYA main office in Stamford, Connecticut. Please go to our website to find your Regional Director’s contact information by state. Your Regional Director is there to help support you and your host family through any issues you may be having. AYA also has a designated Student Support Administrator who will be reaching out to you via email, online surveys, Facebook, and/or phone throughout the year. You will receive four quarterly surveys throughout the year to monitor your progress and help address any support concerns or questions. The first quarterly survey will be distributed to you via email in September. Your participation is necessary for AYA to provide you with all the support you may need this year! Your Local Coordinator is both you and your host family’s first point of contact, but you can also contact the Regional Director or Student Support Administrator if you have any questions or concerns throughout the program year.

**October**

The month of October is when you and your host family may find your relationship evolving, and you may face occasional obstacles. The relationships that you have built with your host family can be tested now with holidays approaching, and homesickness may return again. However, you have some great experiences to look forward to – like Halloween!

- **Overcoming Culture Shock:** With the holidays approaching and the initial excitement of the placement fading, you may start experiencing homesickness. The signs of homesickness vary on a case-by-case basis, but the most common signs are spending too much time alone in your room, on the phone with your natural family or friends from home, or on the computer. Your attitude may change as well – some of you may isolate yourselves, while others may appear to become aggressive and defensive. Please remember that AYA recommends communicating with family and friends back home once a week. Constant communication will only debilitating your ability to move past the homesickness, and your energy should be spent engaging and adapting with your host family and new friends. Participating in family and school activities and events will also help ease your homesickness. Your Local Coordinator is a great resource who will also speak to and encourage you.
November

This can be an exciting, new, yet stressful period for you and your host family! Many of you have had your first Halloween experience and are looking forward to a great American tradition—Thanksgiving. However, some of you may begin to miss your families, especially when your host family may have many of their family members around during these holiday times.

**School Events:** During this time of the exchange year, inquire about getting involved in Homecoming activities. Pep rallies, sporting events, and dances are a great way for you to become involved and experience the American high school spirit.

**Your Host Family’s Adjustment:** It is natural for host families to have difficult points in their year as well. It can be confusing and difficult for your host family to adjust to some challenges that you may be experiencing, as they can affect your relationship and their behavior. Making sure that the channels of communication remain open, especially through these difficult times, is vital to maintaining the expectations that you discussed upon your arrival. Your Local Coordinator and Regional Director will also provide your host family with a great support system and help guide you all through what can be difficult situations.

**Tutoring:** You all arrive on the program with a basic understanding of English and the necessary skills to improve your communication. If you find that you are having difficulty with your English skills, whether academically or in communicating with your family, you can suggest to your Local Coordinator or Regional Director that you would like to pursue tutoring. Your Local Coordinator, host family, or Regional Director will reach out to the high school first, which usually provides free tutoring or after-school extra help. If this is not provided, paid tutoring (paid for by the student) is also an option.

**Budgeting Money:** Some of you may find it difficult to budget your money while on the program. Your host family and Local Coordinator can work with you to develop a monthly budget. Any activities that you want to participate in are your financial responsibility. In order for you to be able to do all of the activities you want, you need to make sure to distinguish between what you need and what you want. Do not ask your host family, LC, or friends to loan you money. This can create tension throughout the year. You and your natural parents are responsible for making sure you have enough personal spending money throughout the entire program.

**Travel over the Holidays:** With the holiday season, traveling may sometimes occur as well. Please remember that you must notify your Local Coordinator of your travel plans and fill out our Independent Travel Form if applicable. Please refer to our AYA Travel Policy to determine if this form is needed for you. Feel free to ask your Local Coordinator or Regional Director if you have any questions about this form, or other travel questions. We encourage our students to spend the holidays with their host family whenever possible, learning about family holiday traditions and enjoying this very American experience.

**REMINDER: No natural family visits are allowed until the end of the program:** It is common for students and their natural parents to discuss family members coming to visit them. It is important to remember that AYA does not permit students to receive visits from natural family members prior to the end of the program (no earlier than two weeks prior to the end of the school year is recommended). If you would like to plan a trip with your natural family at the end of the program, it is important to remember that you can only be signed off the program into the care of your natural parents or a close relative. Students may not sign off the program and attend summer school, participate in any summer education programs, or travel with a tour group or travel program.

**Are you an August Semester Student?**

» Make sure that you have confirmed your flight information.

» If you would like to extend your stay from a semester to a full year, AYA will email a form that you need to fill out and return by December 1st. You will only be permitted to extend if your original host family and high school is able to continue hosting you for the remaining five months and you have not experienced any behavioral or academic disciplinary issues. Students who are on warning or probation may not be permitted to extend. Remember, receiving an extension is not a guarantee. Approved students will be notified in late December and receive their visa extensions in January.

» If you are leaving in January and received medical treatment, please be sure that either you or your host
family contact CareMed or your private insurance provider to confirm that all insurance-related matters are finalized. Insurance issues may take a few weeks to review and process. AYA recommends starting this process now so that all insurance matters are closed prior to departures in January.

- **2nd Quarterly Survey:** You will be receiving the 2nd quarterly survey of the year via email. Please fill out this survey, as it helps us better support you throughout your exchange year.

**December**

December is the highlight of the holiday season for most of our host families and students! We hope that you enjoy this time of the year with your host family and not only embrace your host family’s traditions, but also share your family traditions as well! Be wary of possible homesickness and take advantage of any fun activities planned around family time to help diminish your feelings about missing home and your family and friends!

- **Share Holiday Traditions:** This is a great time when you may be introduced to your family’s traditions and asked to participate, whether it is gift traditions, preparing meals, or other activities that your family is accustomed to doing during this time. AYA encourages you to share your own family’s traditions and meals during this time as well. It will help you cope with any homesickness if you are able to share a piece of your life back home with your American family. Your Local Coordinator may also have holiday activities planned for you and your family. Feel free to reach out to your Local Coordinator and ask if they have anything special planned for their students.

- **Holiday Homesickness:** While you may feel the need to reach out to your family and friends more frequently during this time, we encourage all of our students to limit communication with natural family and friends to prevent you from inflicting further feelings of homesickness upon yourself. Frequent communication with home will often make the feelings of homesickness worse for you. If you need additional information about how to handle your homesickness and the change in behavior, mood, and attitude that come along with it, please contact your Local Coordinator, Regional Director, or Student Support Administrator for further support and guidance.

- **Convalidation Tips for Semester Students:** Exchange students from Brazil, Italy, and Korea are typically required to convalidate for their American grades. Convalidation is when an exchange student translates the grades and credit that he or she has received during the exchange at the host high school, for credit from his or her home high school. Students seeking convalidation are generally required to submit official, signed, and sealed school transcripts to certain identified agencies (consulates of their home country) in order to receive a seal of validation, certifying their grades as authentic. It is the student’s responsibility to take care of their own convalidation process prior to their departure. If you are a student who needs your grades convalidated and you have questions about this process, please ask your Local Coordinator or Regional Director for assistance.

- **Semester StudentsReturning Home – Airport Information:** Please plan transportation to the airport prior to the day of travel. Please remember that for international flights, TSA asks that passengers arrive at check-in at least three hours prior to their flight departure to ensure timely check-in and boarding. Ensure that you have your flight information as well as your passport and other travel documentation handy prior to leaving for the airport. You are responsible for paying for any additional luggage or overweight baggage at the airport! Please contact the AYA emergency line at 1-800-926-2506 if you have any flight issues or cancellations during your return trip home.

**January**

**HAPPY NEW YEAR!** This time of the year may find some of you feeling as if you have hit a wall in your experience. You are unsure about what to do with the next five months. Below are some tips to help encourage and support you! Also, some of you are arriving for our AYA Spring Semester, Welcome! Please refer back to the beginning of this section to help guide you through your first couple of months on the program.

- **Halfway Done – Now What?** For our students who have been on the program since August/September, you may feel a bit down during this time. You have just experienced a very exciting time with your host family and are unsure what your next steps are for the remaining five months. This is a good time to try new activities and clubs or sports to keep you active and involved. Exciting events are coming up for the spring – prom, for one! For those students who are not accustomed to cold weather, there are plenty of fun activities to do in your community during these colder months. Speak to your host family, LC, and friends about the different activities that they participate in during the winter.

- **Semester Students Returning Home: Airport Information:** Please plan transportation to the airport prior to the day of travel. Please be reminded that for international flights, TSA asks that passengers arrive at check-in at least 3 hours prior of their flight departure to ensure timely check-in and boarding. Ensure that you have your flight information handy as well as your passport and other travel documentation prior to leaving for the airport. You are responsible for paying for any additional luggage or overweight baggage at the airport! Please contact the AYA Emergency line at 1-800-926-2506 if you have any flight issues or cancellations during your return trip home.

**February**

February is a settling in month for our year-long students. There is a lot to look forward to, such as spring weather and activities, and many of you will be very busy, as you have adapted to home and school life.
• **Return Flights for Year-Long Students:** You are responsible for arranging your end-of-year flights and adjusting any dates for your return back home. Please remember that the AYA program ends within two weeks after the last day of school. You should arrange your return flight in this two week period. If your host family has plans to travel with you after school ends, please notify your Local Coordinator or Regional Director for approval. Your home organization should be in contact with you soon to inquire about your return flight date preferences. If you have any questions on how to rearrange your return date, contact your home organization, Local Coordinator, or Regional Director, who can provide further assistance.

**March**

This month begins what we at AYA call “Spring Fever.” Many of you will begin to think about your return trip, and some students, and even host families or host siblings, may experience anxiety or mood changes as you begin to realize that you are almost at the end of your experience. Spring break is also a time when you may want to travel with families. Please read the topics below to help with what may be a stressful time for all.

- **Spring Break Travel Information:** If any travel is planned for this spring with you and your host family or your high school friends and their families, please make sure you or your host family contacts your Local Coordinator to ask if any travel forms need to be completed. If you have received permission from AYA and your natural parents to travel with your friend’s family, remember that you cannot travel with friends without a responsible adult of at least 21 years or older being present. A background check must be completed by members of that family over the age of 18, and all contact information and an itinerary must be submitted to AYA and relayed to the natural parents. You cannot travel alone while on the program. We encourage that you plan trips with your host family that will not require you to miss school days. If you will be missing any school days because of a planned trip, please make sure that your Local Coordinator, AYA, and your high school are given the proper notification and approval forms. **Important Note: All travel plans without the host family are also contingent on approval by the AYA National Office.**

- **Insurance Claims for Full Year Students:** Please make sure that if you have sought medical attention while on the program, your medical bills and claims are submitted and resolved as soon as possible. Contact CareMed or your private insurance provider to confirm that your claims have all been settled. Once students go home in June, it is very difficult to resolve these issues for host families. Our goal is to have as many insurance issues resolved before students depart for their home countries as possible.

- **3rd Quarterly Survey:** Your will be receiving the 3rd quarterly survey of the year via email. Please fill out this survey, as it helps us better support you throughout your exchange year. This survey will have questions specific to your end-of-year plans.

**April**

This is a very exciting time when many of you will be experiencing prom and other end-of-year school activities. Some of you will also be returning home next month. Unfortunately, a pattern over the years has emerged where some students may become more inclined to break rules as they know that they will be returning home soon. We encourage students, host families, and Local Coordinators to review expectations and house rules as well as program rules to ensure a smooth transition into the final months of the program.

- **Final Months:** This may prove to be an emotional time of the exchange year for you and your host family. Some exciting times this month may include shopping for Prom with your host family/local coordinator and your host family possibly planning a visit to your home country! Your natural parents may want to visit at the end of the program. Please communicate with your host family, LC, and natural family if this is the case in order to plan accordingly.

- **Preparing for Prom, Graduation and/or End-of-Year Parties:** It is important to budget your money effectively in order to pay for end-of-year activities, school trips, and prom! If you are allowed to participate in your school’s graduation (this is at your high school’s discretion), make sure you have enough money to purchase a cap and gown for the ceremony. This time of the year often involves you being invited to parties and prom. It is important for you, your host family, and your Local Coordinator to sit down and discuss U.S. laws and AYA rules and guidelines in regards to alcohol and drug use. We encourage our students and host families to review “what if” scenarios so that our students can respond responsibly and with good judgment if ever presented with a situation where drugs and/or alcohol are present. Make sure that you provide your host family with the names and phone numbers of the people who will be hosting the get-togethers and confirm that there will be parental supervision. If you get to the party and notice that there are no adults present or there are drugs and/or alcohol being used, contact your host family or Local Coordinator immediately in order to leave the party and avoid a potentially dangerous and risky situation.

- **School Work:** While this time of the year is filled with activities, it is important that you do not put your academics on the back burner. You are expected to maintain a C+ average in every class, regardless of the time of the year, and complete the program on good academic and behavioral standing.

**May**

Some of you will be returning home this month! It is a very bittersweet moment for all involved. You and your host family have built a life-long bond, and it is important to remind yourself that just because you are leaving, that does not mean you cannot continue to contact your host family and friends and maintain these relationships. It’s important to let your host family and LC know that you appreciate them and their efforts to make this year memorable for everyone involved. We hope that this experience has impacted your life positively and that you have grown and
learned from it! The relationships that you have built with your host family and friends also trickle back to the exchange experience that you have given to your community and high school that will last long after you return home! Many of you will experience some form of reverse culture shock where you begin to miss your family and friends in America. It is important to continue to remind yourself of what you have waiting for you back home. Feel free to refer to our section on Reverse Culture Shock and fill out the Re-Entry Worksheet to help you through this adjustment.

- **Transcript Collection:** Please remember to collect your official high school transcript before leaving the U.S.!

- **Preparing for Your Return Home – Reverse Culture Shock:** In preparation for going home, many of you may begin to increase the amount of time you spend talking to your natural family and friends. Try to focus on your time left here and to continue to enjoy it as much as you can. Some of you may find yourselves disengaging from your family because you are saddened by your return home – speak openly with your host family about your return home and express your feelings about leaving. Your host family is also experiencing these emotions, so do not feel that you are the only one going through this.

- **Staying Safe:** It is always important to use sound judgment as you attend both school-sponsored events and events you are invited to by friends. It is important for you, your host family, and your Local Coordinator to sit down and discuss United States laws and AYA rules and guidelines in regards to alcohol and drug use – both of which are prohibited and will result in immediate disqualification from the program. Make sure that you are prepared to react responsibly and with good judgment if ever presented with a situation that makes you feel uncomfortable or that can put your standing on the program in jeopardy. Provide your host family with the contact information or any other information they require about the hosts of these events. If you are presented with any situation that makes you feel uncomfortable, or uncertain about what your actions should be, contact your host family or Local Coordinator immediately for guidance or to leave a potentially risky and dangerous situation. Be alert and aware—your safety is our priority, and we want to ensure that you end the year on a safe and successful note!

- **Students Returning Home – Airport Information:** Please plan transportation to the airport prior to the day of travel. Please be reminded that for international flights, TSA asks that passengers arrive at check-in at least 3 hours prior to their flight departure time to ensure timely check-in and boarding. Ensure that you have your flight information as well as your passport and other travel documentation handy prior to leaving for the airport. You are responsible for paying for any additional luggage or overweight baggage at the airport! Please contact the AYA Emergency line at 1-800-926-2506 if you have any flight issues or cancellations during your return trip home.

- **4th Quarterly Survey:** You will be receiving the 4th quarterly survey of the year via email. Please fill out this survey, as it will have questions asking you to evaluate your overall experience and the support that you have received throughout the year.
June

The end of the program for the majority of our students and host families is here! Again, this will be a challenging time for you and for your family. You have built a close bond throughout these 10 months, and it will be important to reflect on the positive and life-changing effect that this experience has had on everyone. Saying goodbye will be difficult— but the memories you have made and shared will last long after you leave!

We know that this year has been full of highs and lows, and it’s important to let your host family and LC know that you value them and their efforts to ensure that this year was a great experience for everyone involved. It’s always good to remember the impact you have made on your host family and community—they have also learned a lot from you and about your culture. If you know of a family that is interested in hosting with AYA (you will qualify for our “Pass the Torch” student referral bonus), please contact your Local Coordinator or Regional Director to begin the process.

- **Saying Goodbye – Reverse Culture Shock:** In preparation for going home, many of you will begin to increase the amount of time you spend talking to your natural family and friends. It is important to focus on the time you have left and to continue to enjoy it as much as you can. Some of you may unintentionally disengage from your host family because you are saddened by your return home—speak openly with your host family and LC about your feelings surrounding your return home. Your host family most likely is experiencing similar feelings about your departure as well. In addition to the above feelings, other symptoms of reverse culture shock can include fatigue, frustration, and homesickness for the U.S. and your family.

- **Staying Safe:** Just as in the month of May, we know that many of you are busy with end-of-year activities like prom and/or graduation. We remind you to use sound judgment as you attend both school-sponsored events and events you are invited to by friends. Please refer to the safety tips in the month of May for more details on end-of-year events, and if you ever find yourself in a situation that makes you feel uncomfortable, might compromise your standing on the program, or just “doesn’t feel right,” contact your host family, Local Coordinator or an AYA support staff member immediately. Be alert and aware; we want you to end the year safely and on a positive note!

- **Resolving Outstanding Issues (i.e. Phone Bills, Borrowed Items):** Before you leave, please make it a priority to go over and resolve any issues regarding unpaid phone bills, insurance, and medical bills or any items that you borrowed. You are expected to return any items that you borrowed.

- **Airport Information:** Please plan transportation to the airport prior to the day of travel. Please be reminded that for international flights, TSA asks that passengers arrive at check-in at least 3 hours prior to their flight departure to ensure timely check-in and boarding. Ensure that you have your flight information as well as your passport and other travel documentation handy prior to leaving for the airport. You are responsible for paying for any additional luggage or overweight baggage at the airport! Please contact the AYA Emergency line at 1-800-926-2506 if you have any flight issues or cancellations during your return trip home.

Ten Pointers for Intercultural Success

1. **Immerse yourself!** Learn the language by using it as often as possible. Speak frequently, listen to American radio, and watch American movies. Try to avoid speaking your native language whenever possible.

2. **Ask questions!** Don’t pretend to understand if you don’t. Be sure others understand you. Ask for clarification when something is confusing, and get all the information possible.

3. **Be social and stay busy!** This may be difficult for students who are naturally introverted, but now is the time to push yourself out of your comfort zone. Introduce yourself to as many people as possible; be the first one to say “Hi.”

4. **Have a good sense of humor!** Learn to laugh at yourself. The ability to laugh at your mistakes is a positive way to approach the adjustment process.

5. **Relax!** Be patient with yourself and with others. You are learning a new culture and language. Feeling anxious is natural.

6. **Communicate early and often!** If you have a problem, discuss it with your host family or LC immediately. Letting tension build up will only create more problems. 99% of problems can be resolved through open and honest communication.

7. **Remember, it’s not good or bad—it’s just different!** Avoid quick judgments. Judging others quickly with a “good” or “bad” label without knowing the cultural reasons behind their behaviors only closes your mind to learning.

8. **Be accountable!** If you make a mistake or do something culturally inappropriate or that your host family would not approve of, take responsibility. This is a sign of maturity and will go a long way in building your relationships.

9. **Pleasantries go a long way!** Remember to say “please” and “thank you.” And then say “thank you” again. You can’t say “thank you” too often to your host family.

10. **Be Flexible!** Remember that unrealistic expectations are the cause of many disappointments and frustrations. The key to success is evaluating your expectations and readjusting them if necessary; understand that some of your expectations may not apply to your current situation and create new expectations or make the necessary adjustments to adapt to your surroundings.
AYA Student Code of Conduct

AYA expects students to conduct themselves at all times in a manner that positively reflects the goals of the AYA program, their home countries and most importantly, themselves. As an exchange student you are an ambassador of your country and as such it is important that you consider how your behaviors, attitudes and interactions will reflect upon your home country and culture. You are also a reflection of the AYA program, and AYA expects you to represent the program well and behave in a way that honors the integrity of the program and our mission to bring the world together. If your behavior or attitude is determined to undermine the AYA mission or this code of conduct, your participation on the AYA program could be terminated prematurely.

Objective of Student Code of Conduct

The purpose of the student code of conduct is to establish a consistent set of expectations for student behavior on the AYA program. AYA's goal is to ensure that each of our students has a safe and rewarding experience while maintaining a nurturing community wherein the rights and dignity of all individuals are valued and respected. The student code of conduct is the foundation of the AYA disciplinary process and serves to support the program rules.

Standards of Personal Integrity and Honesty

The following behaviors violate AYA's standards of personal integrity and honesty:

1. **Misrepresenting personal circumstances or deliberately issuing false statements**, in order to change host families or obtain any outcome that is favorable to the student is considered a serious infraction of the student code of conduct. Student safety is paramount to AYA and the program encourages students to report any and all circumstances that have the potential to compromise a student's health, safety or overall well being. AYA takes any allegations of impropriety, misconduct or unsuitable housing arrangements seriously and will take swift and appropriate action to ensure that the student is safe and investigate the claims accordingly. AYA values the safety, health and dignity of all of our participants, representatives and volunteers and students must be aware that issuing false claims or statements about any person or circumstance associated with the placement has the potential to permanently damage the reputation of an individual, family or community and is considered a serious breach of ethics. If a student is found to have deliberately issued any false statements or deliberately misrepresented their circumstances for any reason, he or she will be subject to immediate disciplinary action, up to and including disqualification.

2. **Intentionally furnishing, misrepresenting or omitting information on the student application.** AYA student applications must be completed accurately and honestly in order for AYA program staff to make an informed decision about a student's eligibility to participate on the program.

3. **Academic Dishonesty.** Any academic act of deception that is intentionally done to gain an unfair advantage for the student or another individual. This includes, but is not limited to giving or receiving assistance in an academic assignment/exam; plagiarizing or paraphrasing without appropriate citation and intentionally taking credit for the work of others.

Standards of Safety and Dignity

The following behaviors undermine AYA's objective to respect and protect the safety, health and dignity of all individuals:

1. **Intentionally or recklessly endangering the student's own health, safety or welfare or that of any individual.** This includes but is not limited to the following:
   a) Possession of any object classified as a weapon (i.e. knives, firearms, bludgeon weapons, brass knuckles, explosives, etc.).
   b) Operating a motor vehicle without a license or outside of AYA program rules.
   c) Driving with a person who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
   d) Driving with a person who is showing irresponsible behavior (i.e. cell phone use, texting, speeding, racing, etc.).
   e) Consuming and/or sharing drugs or alcohol, including abuse of over the counter drugs/drugs/supplements and drugs that are prescribed but being used for recreational purposes.

2. **Disorderly Conduct:** Any behavior that is intended to be disruptive, threatening, lewd or incendent. This includes the intentional or reckless destruction or damage of personal property (i.e. vandalism, tire slashing, damaging pranks).

3. **Demonstrating a lack of sound judgment and maturity by engaging in behavior that could compromise the student’s own safety and wellbeing.** For example:
   a) Getting into a car with a stranger;
   b) Leaving the home or school without permission and/or knowledge of your surroundings
   c) Knowingly going to places where illegal activity could be present (i.e., parties or a friend’s house; concerts, after-prom parties, etc.)
4. **Irresponsible use of social media/communication outlets:**
   a) Engaging in sexually explicit conversations via social media or other digital communications.
   b) Sharing sexually explicit or violent images or videos.
   c) Posting or sharing photos that may be sexually suggestive
   d) Posting or sharing content that disparages or demeans any individual, race, religion or sexual orientation.
   e) Putting up content that could compromise the trust, privacy or character of the student’s host family or any other member of the community.

5. **Harassment:** AYA defines harassment as any instance or repeated instances of conduct which annoys, threatens or causes an individual to fear for his or her safety. AYA will not tolerate any behavior that is intended to threaten, disparage or offend an individual. Examples of harassing behavior include but are not limited to:
   a) Uninvited comments about any individual's appearance.
   b) Unwanted touching, gestures or comments of a sexual nature including, verbal, non-verbal and written communication.
   c) Derogatory comments intended to disparage or demean an individual based on sex, religion, race, ethnicity, physical or mental challenges, or sexual orientation.
   d) Physical assault of any kind.
AYA Student Rules

As an AYA exchange student you are a representative of this program, of your country, and, most importantly, of yourself and your family. As such, you are expected, at all times, to conduct yourself in a manner that positively reflects the goals and mission of the AYA program, your country, and the values that represent you and your family at home.

It is your responsibility to know and abide by the rules outlined here for your safety and well-being. AYA expects all students to cooperate with these rules and encourages you to ask your host family, Local Coordinator, or AYA directly to explain any rules that you do not understand.

Failure to abide by the following rules may result in dismissal from the program and termination of your visa:

Rules in bold are considered zero tolerance rules, and any infraction will result in immediate disqualification from the program.

1. **Students must abide by all U.S. laws.**

2.  **It is against the law in the United States for high school students to buy or drink alcohol. This law applies to all AYA students as well. The legal age for buying and consuming alcohol in the United States is 21.**

3. **The use and possession of drugs and/or drug paraphernalia for non medical reasons by AYA students under any circumstances is strictly prohibited. Examples of nonmedical (illegal) drugs are cocaine, LSD, medications taken with or without a prescription or for recreational use, and marijuana.**

4. **Students are not permitted to drive any motor vehicle (including motorcycles, mopeds, and cars) except during the course of an accredited driver education class. Students may enroll in a school-sponsored driver education class if their host and natural parents permit it and it is permissible in the host state.**

5. **Along with maintaining a minimum average students must be in good behavior standing with their high school at all time. This includes attending classes daily and on time. If a student is suspended or expelled from school for any reason, it is grounds for immediate dismissal from the program.**

6. **AYA students are not permitted to hitchhike.**

7. **Students are strictly prohibited from operating or being a passenger on All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) of any kind. Students are also not permitted to operate or be a passenger on small, private, or non-commercial aircrafts, even with a licensed pilot.**

8. **AYA students are not permitted to purchase, carry, or use firearms or any items classified as a weapon under any circumstances including under the supervision of an instructor or host parent. Students should report any instance of firearms being stored improperly or being offered to a student to handle.**

9. **AYA students are not permitted to hold part-time jobs; the J-1 visa does not allow it. A non-immigrant alien who accepts paid employment is subject to deportation. If students would like to earn spending money during their stay, they are permitted to hold small jobs (no more than 10 hours per week) such as babysitting and grass-cutting.**

10. **Students are not permitted to smoke or possess cigarettes while on the AYA program.**

11. **The AYA program is an academic program. Students must maintain a minimum C+ average in all courses. Students must also enroll in an appropriate English language or literature course and an American Studies course.**

12. **Students must attend school daily unless sick and under a doctor’s care or with special permission from host parents. Students must complete all homework and assignments.**

13. **Students are not permitted to visit such places as pornographic shops, adult theaters, drinking establishments, or any websites related to pornography.**

14. **Students must respect and abide by all host family rules, act as a member of the family, and voluntarily help with household chores. Students must show respect for their Local Coordinators and follow all program guidelines.**

15. **Students must conduct themselves, at all times, in a manner that positively represents AYA, their home country and themselves. Any behavior that does not support the goals or has the potential to negatively impact the reputation of the AYA program may be grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including disqualification.**

16. **Harassment of any kind is strictly prohibited. This includes but is not limited to physical assault, verbal harassment or sexual harassment. Students who engage or are complicit in the harassment of another individual will be subject to a disciplinary hearing that may result in disqualification.**

17. **Except in cases where a student’s safety is in question, students must follow the appropriate chain of communication and contact their Local Coordinator or an AYA support staff member if there is an issue or concern with their host family. Students may not discuss their host family’s private affairs or family life with people outside of the home or the AYA program.**
18. Students cannot change families and schools without mediation or due process. With the exception of emergencies, host family changes will not be considered during the first 30 days of arrival to the host family. Students cannot move from the host family home without permission from their Local Coordinator and approval from the AYA national office.

19. Students are allowed to travel only if accompanied by a responsible adult (21 years of age or older), if: a.) their AYA Regional Director has received an Independent Travel Form signed by their natural parents; b.) their host family approves; and c.) the trip does not involve missing any school. The exception is a school-sponsored trip. Students must notify their Local Coordinator of all proposed travel plans at least two weeks prior to the trip. Students may not return to their homeland for holidays or for any reason other than an extreme emergency.

20. Students must not engage in any sexual contact or sexual activity that is culturally inappropriate in the U.S., including (but not limited to) contact with minors or with any members of the Host Family household.

21. Sexual intercourse on-program is prohibited.

22. Athletic eligibility or participation is not guaranteed. It is dependent on local and national rules and school policies. Students will not be permitted to change schools or host families in order to play sports.

23. High school graduation diplomas are not guaranteed. They are dependent on local and national rules and individual school policies. Students will not be permitted to change schools or host families in order to obtain a diploma.

24. Parents and friends may not visit the student during the program and may not disturb the host family life. If relatives and friends would like to visit, they must wait until the end of the program, which is deemed no earlier than December 1st for one semester students and April 15th for full year students. Visits must be pre-arranged with the host family prior to booking travel.

25. No student may enter into any contractual agreement, be it business, marital, or religious, while on the program.

26. Students are expected to be honest and ethical at all time. Misrepresenting personal circumstances in order to change host families or obtain a desired result, is considered very serious. AYA takes the safety of each student very seriously. If a student is found to have intentionally falsified or misrepresented his or her circumstances within the host family or the community, he or she will be reviewed by the disciplinary committee.

27. Students are expected to respect and adhere to the AYA Student Code of Conduct, the AYA program rules and program guidelines as noted in the AYA student handbook.

28. Students must return home within a few days of the last day of school. Students may stay up to a maximum of two weeks after the end of school if they are explicitly invited to so by their host family. When the program ends, students may only sign off the program to be placed in the care of their immediate natural family.

Additional AYA Program Guidelines:

In addition to following the above-listed program rules, AYA students will be expected to adhere to the following guidelines at all times.

- Students must always be aware of their responsibilities as an exchange student and make a determined effort to be successful in their school, host family, and host community.
- Students should limit contact with other exchange students during the program and make all necessary efforts to integrate with their host family and make American friends.
- On special occasions (holidays, birthdays, etc.), the student’s priority must be to spend this time with the host family.
- Students should limit international phone calls, emails, and digital communication to parents or friends and respect their host families’ rules regarding internet and phone usage. All students should be aware that if it is determined that excessive communication with friends back home is contributing to adjustment issues, a counseling plan may be implemented to limit contact until the student has demonstrated improved adjustment.
- AYA expects you to return to your home country in the same physical condition that you arrived; this means students may not get pierced, tattooed, or drastically alter their appearance in any way.
AYA students are expected to conduct themselves at all times in a manner that positively reflects on themselves, their home country, and the goals of the AYA program. Students are expected to follow all U.S. laws and AYA, host family, and high school rules and guidelines. Students are required to sign a copy of the AYA rules prior to their arrival in the U.S. Disciplinary decisions are made at the discretion of the AYA Disciplinary Committee based on information provided by the LC, the host family, the student, and the high school (when applicable). It is strongly recommended that students carefully review the program rules with their natural parents prior to departing from their home country.

Mediation and Communication Sessions

Mediation is generally the first step in resolving most issues. A mediation is a formal or informal meeting with your host family and Local Coordinator where you and your host family will have the opportunity to openly discuss any concerns or problems in a safe setting. Your Local Coordinator will conduct the mediation and act as a neutral mediator who will help you and your host family work through any issues, big or small.

- Mediation has proven to be very successful in opening a dialogue between host families and students as well as clarifying cultural and/or language miscommunications.
- Mediation and communication sessions resolve 85% of all problems.
- Mediation is a critical step in the disciplinary process and will be done prior to any consideration for a host family change.
- Students and host families are expected to attend mediation with an open mind.

Warning

A warning letter is issued by the AYA Regional Director after a breach of conduct or program guidelines has been reported. Warning letters are usually issued after mediation has occurred and the student has been formally advised of the program or host family guidelines that have been compromised. In cases where there the breach of guidelines is indisputable, for example, if a student is not meeting minimum grade requirements, a warning letter will be issued without prior mediation. A copy of the warning letter is sent to the student, Local Coordinator, overseas partner, host family, and high school (when applicable). Overseas partners also forward a copy of the warning letter to the student’s natural parents for review.

The intent of the warning letter is:

- To formally advise the student, the natural family, and the overseas partners of unacceptable behavior or program violation.
- To inform the student that there should be no further infractions.
- To advise the student that the National Office is aware of this behavior.
- To advise what specific steps must be taken by the student to avoid further disciplinary action.
- To formally define a time frame for reviewing the student’s performance.

Guidance Notice

Over the course of the year, students may receive a guidance notice; this is a guidance directive that serves to:

- Document a particular concern or behavior.
- Implement guidelines on how to make the necessary adjustments to be successful on the program.

A guidance notice may be issued with a warning or in lieu of a warning letter.

Guidance notices may be used to document a pattern of behavior during the disciplinary review process.

Probation

Being placed on probation is considered very serious. Students will be subject to probation for the following reasons:

- A major breech of program rules or host family guidelines.
- Not abiding by the terms of a previously issued warning letter.
- Conduct unbecoming to an exchange student that may jeopardize the reputation of the student, host family, or the AYA program.
Prior to being placed on probation, the student will be contacted by his or her Regional Director to discuss the disciplinary concerns. The Regional Director will also speak with all other parties – host family, Local Coordinator, and high school (if applicable). The Regional Director will then discuss the case with the AYA Disciplinary Committee, which will determine if probation is warranted. All probation letters are issued by the Student Support Team, and a copy is sent to the student, Local Coordinator, host parents and overseas partner. The intent of the probation letter is to clarify the issues and outline actions for improvement. The overseas partner then forwards the probation letter to a student’s natural parents for review. Probation is considered a student’s final opportunity to abide by all program rules and expectations prior to disqualification. If a student continues to demonstrate poor judgment or behavioral or academic concerns while on probation, the student will be disqualified from the program.

Disqualification

This occurs when an offense is deemed serious enough to merit termination. Any student who fails to comply with the AYA rules, the host family rules, or local and federal laws may be terminated from the AYA program. Students with on-going failing grades and/or who have been expelled from school will be terminated from the program. Sending a student home is usually considered a last resort, and this decision is made at the sole discretion of the AYA Disciplinary Committee. This step is usually taken after other corrective measures have failed or if the infraction has violated a major program rule or a federal or state law.

In some cases, a student’s actions may result in disqualification from the program without prior disciplinary action such as warning and/or probation. For example, consumption of alcohol or drugs, expulsion from school, driving, any type of sexual or physical harassment, sexual activity, or violation of U.S. law will result in immediate disqualification from the program.

Also, there may be times when a student’s behavior or pattern of behavior precludes AYA from finding another host family regardless of the disciplinary history. If, after a designated period of time AYA is unable to find a new host family for a student with behavioral issues or unable to recommend a student to a new host family in good faith, he or she may be asked to withdraw from the program early and/or may be reviewed by the disciplinary committee for early dismissal. Disqualification is determined after careful review and deliberation by the Disciplinary Committee.

Notice of disqualification is sent by the student support team to all parties concerned, and arrangements for the student’s return flight home are then made. Once a student has been disqualified, his or her visa will be cancelled, and the student will not be entitled to a refund. Students are responsible for any cost or expense incurred as a result of disqualification.

Medical Disqualification

In the unfortunate situation that a student falls ill or requires medical treatment beyond the scope of what an AYA host family can provide, a student may be terminated from the program. This decision is made with the interest and well-being of the student in mind, and in the context of what the AYA program can safely offer a student.

Reasons for medical disqualification include, but are not limited to:

- Discovery of preexisting medical conditions not disclosed on a student’s application, particularly nervous disorders or conditions that require close monitoring by a physician
- Injuries requiring surgery and/or ongoing physical therapy
- Serious medical conditions that require extensive medical care and follow-up care
- Eating disorders
- Emotional or psychological concerns
Positive/Appropriate Displays of Affection could include:

- Brief hugs
- Pats on the shoulder and back
- A handshake
- High-fives/slapping hands
- Verbal praise
- Brief touch on hands, face, shoulder, arms
- Arm around shoulder
- Holding hands during family prayer
- Brief kiss on the cheek

Negative/Inappropriate Displays of Affection could include:

- Inappropriate/lengthy hugs and embraces
- Intentional brushing against a person’s body, patting, or pinching
- Adult holding hands with student
- Kisses on the mouth
- Student sitting on adult’s lap
- Touching bottoms, chest, or genital areas
- Showing affection in isolated areas like bathroom, bedroom
- Lying on same bed
- Touching of the knees or legs
- Wrestling and tickling
- Any type of massage
- Written or spoken compliments referring to body or body development
- Giving excessive or personal gifts or money
- Private meals in intimate places

Behavior Guidelines:

- Any unwanted attention
- Modesty Guidelines:
  - No nudity by student or host family
  - No contact between student and adult in underwear
  - Wear robes over your pajamas
  - No suggestive or revealing clothing
  - Wearing only a towel is not acceptable

Student Safety

- No requests for meeting with students privately
- No telephoned, mailed, or emailed messages of a sexual or intimate nature
- No flirting
- No jokes with sexual connotation
- No lewd remarks, whistles
- No sharing or display of photos or materials of a sexual nature

It is never appropriate, under any circumstances, for you to be approached or touched in a sexual or sexually suggestive manner by any member of the host family or any other adult. Such contact may constitute a criminal offense, and AYA will cooperate fully with the authorities in the investigation and prosecution of any such illegal activities. If anyone has attempted to inappropriately touch or speak with you, you must contact your Local Coordinator or the AYA office immediately.

Likewise, it is never appropriate for you to initiate any sexual contact with any member of your host family.

Safety Precautions

AYA encourages you to be open-minded and meet new people while you are in the U.S. However, in doing so we also encourage you to exercise caution and be aware of interactions that could make you feel uncomfortable or lead to a potentially dangerous situation. Below, we have a few “red flags” to be aware of throughout the year. While they are not each, in themselves, always indicators of a potentially dangerous relationship or situation, they should serve as reminders to be aware of what may or may not be appropriate. We want to ensure that as you get to know new people, the relationships you are developing are healthy and positive.
• Be aware of any adult or individual who seeks to spend a lot of one-on-one “alone” time with you outside of an appropriate context. For example, a neighbor who wants to take you to the movies alone, a family friend who finds reasons to come and see you or invites you to one-on-one activities without your host family; or a coach who offers private lessons at his/her house. You should ask a trusted adult or AYA support staff member if you have questions about whether or not an invitation or interaction is appropriate.

• Texting and social media – be aware of who you are texting with and interacting with on social media websites. If you find that an adult or peer is contacting you excessively, or making comments to you that make you feel uncomfortable, contact AYA right away.

• Any adult who gives you lavish gifts, secret gifts, or gifts that are contingent upon an action from you (i.e., your neighbor tells you that if you get good grades, you’ll receive a special gift).

• Any adult who confides in you or asks you to keep a secret of any kind. It is not appropriate for adults to confide in teenagers as equals, nor is it appropriate for an adult to expect a teenager to keep a secret of any kind.

• Flirtations and sexually explicit jokes are never acceptable between an adult and a minor.

• Be aware of any adult who encourages you to break rules or engage in illegal or inappropriate behaviors of any kind.

**Additional Safety Tips:**

• Check with your host family or Local Coordinator before going anywhere new or unfamiliar to ensure that it is a safe place/area.

• Ask your host family and/or Local Coordinator if there are any parts of town to avoid when walking around during the day or night.

• When going out, try to always be with two or more people and avoid situations where you will be alone.

• Always carry a cell phone or ensure that the person you are with has a working cell phone.

• Keep your home phone number, your Local Coordinator’s number, and AYA’s office and emergency numbers with you at all times.

• Ask your host family to write down emergency service numbers if you are going to be staying home alone for any length of time.

• If you are ever in a situation with friends or an adult that makes you feel uncomfortable for any reason, leave immediately and/or call your Local Coordinator, host family, or a trusted adult right away.

• Always trust your instincts—if something doesn’t feel right, let someone know!

**Emergency**

If you have an emergency of any kind outside of business hours (9 a.m. – 5 p.m. EST), AYA has a 24-hour toll free emergency answering service available to assist you 7 days a week, year round. Our toll-free phone number is 800.322.4678. Follow the prompts from the operator or stay on the line to be connected with the answering service.

You may also contact the service directly at 800.926.2506; an agent will take your message, and your call will be promptly returned by an AYA support staff member.

If for any reason you are not able to reach your LC or AYA through our emergency support outlets, you may also contact the Department of State Emergency Hotline at 866.283.9090.

Our goal is to ensure that you are safe, and we encourage you to reach out if you have any concerns. We are here to help you!
End-of-Year Preparations

The official end of the AYA program is the last day of school. Students can stay one to two weeks after the end of the school semester with the permission of the host family.

Extensions

If you are an August semester student and would like to extend for another semester, please contact your Local Coordinator. Only August semester students are allowed to extend. Your Local Coordinator will provide you with the appropriate forms for signatures. All parties—the host family, Local Coordinator, school, student, natural parents, and National Office—must agree to the extension.

In order to be eligible to extend, students must be invited to stay with their original host family and continue studying in their original high school for the spring semester. Students on probation or with a disciplinary history including behavioral or academic concerns are not allowed to extend. If you have received a warning letter, your request to extend will be reviewed on an individual basis.

December 1st is the deadline for extension paperwork to be submitted to the AYA office. AYA reserves the right to accept or deny any extensions. Students who extend may not change host families in the second semester unless there are extenuating circumstances.

Students on extension cannot travel outside of the U.S. due to visa restrictions. Additional fees and insurance will be required.

Return Flight Plans

You are required to hold valid return airline tickets. These tickets are purchased either by you or through AYA partner agencies. These tickets can be either “open return” tickets or changeable tickets, which are booked with a specific return date. AYA does not directly purchase international tickets for you. On occasion, AYA does purchase domestic tickets for students.

You are responsible for making your own flight reservations for your return home at the end of the program. You should call the airlines directly to make domestic and international reservations on the date agreed upon by you and your host family. You should make your international reservations first, and then make your domestic reservations to ensure you know the time your international flight departs. Also, please be advised that you may hold youth fare tickets that carry certain restrictions, or may require minimal additional fees to be paid when booking returns, especially if you change the date or flights from those listed on your original ticket(s).

In rare cases, you may be required to spend the night at the airport if your domestic flight does not allow you to arrive in time to meet your international flight. AYA can provide assistance in obtaining hotel accommodations for you; however, you are responsible for the cost of any extra nights’ stay.

If you have difficulties with your return reservations, you should call your Local Coordinator or your AYA Regional Director for assistance.

End-of-Program and End-of-Year Travel

The official end of the AYA program is the last day of school. With permission from your host family, you may stay up to two weeks past the last day of school; however, if something changes and your family is no longer able host you past the end of school, you may need to return home earlier.

Students who wish to travel at the end of their year may do so only if they are in the care of their natural parents or a close relative over the age of 21 years. If you will travel at the end of the AYA program, you must sign a Year-End Program Release Form, which formally signs you off the AYA program. Your Local Coordinator or the AYA office can provide you with this form.

AYA students are not allowed to sign off the program to travel with friends, participate in summer school or other educational programs, or travel with a tour group. AYA highly recommends that you check with your Local Coordinator or the AYA support team before confirming any end-of-program travel arrangements.

End-of-Program Visa Regulations

In compliance with federal regulations, AYA is required to maintain accurate records for all exchange visitors for whom we sponsor a visa. When a student leaves the program for any reason (voluntary, involuntary, school ends), AYA will update our SEVIS records to ensure that the student’s end-date is properly recorded, at which time the technical grace period will begin. For any student leaving more than 15 days prior to the end date listed on their DS2019 form, AYA will update that student’s SEVIS record, and that new date will begin the technical grace period for that student. Students are responsible for reporting accurate departure dates and complying with all end-of-year program guidelines. Students who do not comply with end-of-year departure procedures are at risk for encountering travel complications when they depart and/or attempt to re-enter the U.S. outside of visa guidelines.

Final Reminders

You and your host family will find it hard to believe that the semester or year has come to an end. Here is a reminder checklist to go over at least two weeks prior to departure:

- Confirm return flight date and time
- Gather all necessary travel documents
• Pay any outstanding bills
• Convalidate grades if necessary
• Write thank you letters to teachers, host families, Local Coordinators, and other significant people
• Pack and weigh luggage to ensure it is within airline weight limits (contact airlines for more details). If luggage is over airline weight limits, you should plan to incur an extra cost or make prior plans for shipping.

Returning Home

A great amount of information has been written on culture shock, homesickness, and creating a bond with the host family. The adjustment that you will need to make after you return to your home country is just as crucial to prepare for. Also known as re-entry shock, Reverse Culture Shock (RCS) is 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. Here 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 with your host family.

Reverse Culture Shock (RCS)

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

Why does RCS occur?

• People and places have changed.
• The student has changed and sees 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 the student’s experiences as he/she is in sharing them.
• Few expect to have trouble adjusting to home and therefore do not prepare.

An awareness of the feelings and behaviors most commonly associated with RCS can help you and your host family prepare for your own experience. Knowing what to expect and knowing that certain feelings are normal can make the experience less stressful and more manageable.

Typical student feelings and behaviors as a result of RCS before and after departure:

• Excited to be going home
• Sad that host family is making plans beyond your stay
• Tendency to withdraw from the host family; it may seem easier to say goodbye if you do not feel as close to your host family
• Confused that the host family may be pulling away from you
• Honeymoon period initially when returning home; it is so great to be back and see everyone
• Tendency to compare everything to the U.S.; others are not interested in these comparisons
• “Homesick” for the U.S.
• Come to terms with being at home
• Take the best of American culture and develop lifelong relationship with host family
• Sad that the student is making plans for after s/he gets home
• Looking forward to some privacy
• Tendency to withdraw from the student; it may seem easier to say goodbye if you do not feel as close to the student
• Frustrated that the student may be withdrawing from you
• Sense of relief once the student is gone
• Dealing with withdrawal; sense of grief at the loss of the student
• Develop lifelong relationship with the student

Now that you and your host family are aware of some of the typical feelings and behaviors to expect, you can work together to make RCS as painless as possible. Separation and letting go is never easy. However, with every ending comes a new beginning, and we hope your family and your students feel enriched as a result of this experience.

Below are some suggested coping strategies for your family and your student to utilize before and after departure. Hopefully, if you put some of these practices in place, you will be prepared to face the challenges that RCS presents.

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 with yourself; adjustment takes time.

• 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.

• 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.

• Host families: Share your perspectives with others about your student’s country, culture, and/or language.

• Students: Be a mentor to others who are planning to study abroad or are currently abroad.

• Host families: Be a mentor for other host families.

• Find a way to incorporate your experience into your daily life.

• Students: Encourage your family to host another exchange student.

• 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.

• 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.
Holidays in the United States

The following is a list of important holidays celebrated in the U.S. Most of them are unique to America. However, you may find a few that are celebrated in your home country as well.

Labor Day – Always celebrated on the first Monday in September, to honor working men and women.

Jewish New Year – Rosh Hashanah – Usually celebrated in September or October.

Jewish Day of Atonement – Yom Kippur – Is considered the holiest day in the Jewish year and is the end of 10 days of penance that begins with Rosh Hashanah.

Columbus Day – Is celebrated the second Monday in October, to mark the landing in America by Christopher Columbus on October 12, 1492.

Halloween – October 31. On this night, children—and sometimes adults—dress up in costumes and masks and go house-to-house saying “Trick or treat” in the hope that they will receive candy or other goodies. People also carve faces into pumpkins called “Jack O’ Lanterns” and put them on their doorstep.

Election Day – Is always held in November, on the first Tuesday after the first Monday. Some businesses and offices are closed for the day.

Veteran’s Day – November 11. Honors all those who have served in the Armed Forces.

Thanksgiving Day – Always celebrated the fourth Thursday in November, commemorating the first harvest by early American settlers. It also celebrates the sharing of that harvest among settlers and Native Americans.

Hanukkah – Celebrated by Jews and known as the Festival of Lights. This holiday commemorates the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem and lasts for eight days; it usually falls in December.

Christmas – December 25. A special holiday celebrating the birth of Christ. Gifts are exchanged.

New Year’s Day – January 1. The New Year concludes the winter holiday season. New Year festivities include fireworks, parties, and football games on TV.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day – Celebrated the third Monday of January. This holiday honors the major leader of the African-American non-violent Civil Rights Movement.

Valentine’s Day – February 14. A specific day to send expressions of love and affection to friends, family, loved ones, and sweethearts.

Presidents’ Day – Washington’s and Lincoln’s Birthday. Honoring the memory of two of America’s greatest presidents: George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. This holiday is celebrated on the third Monday in February.

St. Patrick’s Day – March 17. A significant day for Irish Americans to remember St. Patrick, the patron saint who converted Ireland to Christianity. Many cities and towns have a parade on this day.

April Fools’ Day – April 1. A day when people play tricks on each other and then announce, “April Fool!”

Good Friday – Christians observe the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the Friday before Easter.

Easter – Celebrated on the first Sunday after the full moon on or after March 21. This holiday celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Passover – A Jewish holiday, usually close to Easter, that celebrates the story of the Hebrews’ flight from Egypt and is celebrated with a Passover supper, or Seder, and specific foods.

Mother’s Day – The second Sunday in May, when mothers receive cards and/or gifts and special attention.

Memorial Day – The last Monday May. To remember and honor deceased friends and loved ones who lost their lives during military service.

Father’s Day – The third Sunday in June. Fathers are given cards and/or gifts and special attention.

The contiguous 48 states of the United States fall into five distinct climatic areas:

1. **North Pacific – Oregon and Washington**
   This area of the country receives the greatest amount of precipitation, with some areas exceeding 150” (3,800 mm) annually. Most of the precipitation occurs during the winter season in the form of snow, with moderate temperatures averaging 40º F (4º C). Summer temperatures rise to about 90º (32º C), and the weather is dry.

2. **Mid Pacific and Rockies – California, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming**
   This is an area of tremendous variety. Depending upon the altitude, temperatures can range from a low of -66º F (-55º C) to a high of 115º F (46º C). Average rainfall is 12” (305 mm), and the weather is usually sunny and dry.

3. **Midwest – North and South Dakota, Minnesota through Central Texas**
   Annual precipitation varies from 23” (610 mm) to 32” (813 mm), and the rainy season occurs mainly in late spring and early summer. This is an area of great extremes — from very cold in the winter (-50º F, or -45º C) in North Dakota to very hot in the summer (115º F, or 46º C) in Texas.

4. **Southwest – Southwestern Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Southern California**
   This is the driest and hottest region in the country. Precipitation averages less than 10” (254 mm) and falls mostly as summer showers. In the summer, the temperature can rise to over 110º F (43º C). Temperatures usually remain above freezing during the winter; however, there are occasional frosts in January and February.

5. **The East Coast – states east of Lake Superior to the tip of Texas**
   Rainfall averages between 30” (762 mm) and 50” (1,270 mm), but precipitation occurs year-round. In the northern part of this area, snow occurs during the winter months. Generally, the summer months are sunny and warm, with temperatures in the 80ºs and 90ºs (27-32º C), but it can be extremely humid and uncomfortable along the Gulf of Mexico coast.
Setting up for Success!
Host Family and Student Expectations Worksheet

Setting clear expectations is the key to a successful home-stay experience for both a student and a host family. AYA strongly encourages host families and students to take the time to complete this worksheet together, within 72 hours of the student’s arrival. Take this opportunity to discuss personal and cultural differences and establish common goals, clear expectations, and a strong foundation for success!

Make sure that everyone understands what is expected of them, and that notes are written clearly and in language that everyone can understand. Choose a central location and post the completed worksheet in a visible location so that the student is reminded of expectations on a daily basis!

### Meals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Eaten Together /Eaten Individually</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>_________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>_________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>_________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snacks</td>
<td>_________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### School Lunch

Does student take a lunch or buy it? _____________________________________________

Who makes lunch if taken from house? ____________________________________________

Who pays for lunch if it is purchased? ____________________________________________

Where can food be eaten? _______________________________________________________

Are there any rooms in which food cannot be eaten in?  
  - If yes, which rooms? ________________________________________________________

Does the student or family have any food allergies or dietary restrictions?  
  - If yes, what are they? _______________________________________________________

Can the student request special snacks  
  (something the host family would not normally purchase)?  
  - If yes, who should he/she inform, and who should pay? ____________________________
### Laundry

Where should dirty clothes be placed?

Are there set days when laundry is to be done?  
- Yes  
- No

If yes, what days?

Who is responsible for sorting, washing, drying, folding, ironing, hand washing?

### Telephone

Is there a time limit on phone calls?  
- Yes  
- No

If yes, what are they?

What are the appropriate times for phone calls?

What are the inappropriate times for phone calls?

Who can give permission to make long distance calls?

Will the student have a cell phone?  
- Yes  
- No

Can the cell phone be taken to school?  
- Yes  
- No

Who will be paying for the cell phone plan/how?

Are there restrictions on cell phone usage, including texting, social media, etc.?  
- Yes  
- No

If yes, what are the rules?

### Computer

Is there a time limit on the computer?  
- Yes  
- No

If yes, what is the limit?

Is there a specific place where the computer should be used for socializing/homework?  
- Yes  
- No

If yes, where should it be used?

What are the appropriate times for computer usage?

What are the inappropriate times for computer usage?

Are there restrictions regarding websites, downloading, and emailing?  
- Yes  
- No

If yes, what are the restrictions?

What should the student know about internet safety and protecting the privacy of the student and family?

---

*AYA recommends that communication with friends and family back home should be limited to a reasonable amount to help avoid hindering adjustment and increasing homesickness.*
Student Room

Can the student put pictures on the wall? □ Yes □ No

- With nails?
- With tape?
- Other?

Can the furniture arrangement be changed? □ Yes □ No

Who cleans? _______________________________________________________________________________________________

How often? _______________________________________________________________________________________________

Bathroom

Where does the student’s towel go? _____________________________________________________________________________

Where should the student’s toiletries be placed? ___________________________________________________________________

Are toiletries to be shared? □ Yes □ No

Is there a limit on showers? □ Yes □ No

If yes, how many per day? _______________________________________________________________________________________

If yes, what is the time limit? ___________________________________________________________________________________

Is there a scheduled morning/evening bathroom time for the student? □ Yes □ No

If yes, what is it ______________________________________________________________________________________________

How should the bathroom be left? (i.e., door open, bath mat on rack) _______________________________________________________________________________________

Household Chores

Who sets the table, clears the table, does dishes, cooks meals? _______________________________________________________________________________________________

Who cleans up after snacks? __________________________________________________________________________________________

Who tidies up the bathroom? ___________ How often? _______________________________________________________________________________________________

What other chores will the student be expected to share in? _______________________________________________________________________________________

Household Rules

How should student proceed when scheduling outside activities? _______________________________________________________________________________________________

Should student get host parent permission? □ Yes □ No

Are there days or times when outside activities are not allowed? □ Yes □ No

If yes, what days? __________________________________________________________________________________________

How far in advance does the student need to notify you of plans outside the home? _____________________________________

How far in advance should the student request a ride/transportation to and from an activity or event? __________________________
Is student allowed to ride in cars driven by teenage drivers? □ Yes □ No
  With permission? □ Yes □ No
  Without permission? □ Yes □ No

Does student need permission to stay after school? □ Yes □ No

Can the student invite friends over? □ Yes □ No
  With permission? □ Yes □ No
  Without permission? □ Yes □ No
  How much notice?_________________________________________________________

Can the student go out with friends during the week? □ Yes □ No
  If yes, when?_______________________________________________________________

Can the student go out with friends on weekends? □ Yes □ No
  If yes, when?_______________________________________________________________

What is the student’s curfew on weekdays? __________________ Weekends? __________________

Does the student need to contact host parents if plans change? □ Yes □ No

Does host family need to know where student is at all times? □ Yes □ No

How will student be required to notify host parents of whereabouts/change of plans?
  □ Phone call
  □ Cell
  □ Home
  □ Text message

Are there certain family activities the student will be expected to participate in? □ Yes □ No
(For example, sporting events, community events, game night)
  If yes, what events? __________________________________________________________________________________________

Dating Rules?

What are the rules regarding dating? __________________________________________________________________________________

What are the rules regarding spending time with a potential date inside and outside of the home? __________________________________________________________________________________

Are there any dating restrictions? □ Yes □ No
  If yes, what are the restrictions? __________________________________________________________________________________

Religious Services

Do family members participate in weekly services? □ Yes □ No
  If yes, what time? __________________________________________________________________________________________
Do family members participate in other regular religious services?  
☐ Yes  ☐ No  
If yes, when? __________________________________________________________________________________________________

Do family members participate in youth group activities?  
☐ Yes  ☐ No  
If yes, when? __________________________________________________________________________________________________

Does the student wish to attend with family?  
☐ Yes  ☐ No  
If so, how often? _______________________________________________________________________________________________

Does the student wish to attend a different religious service?  
☐ Yes  ☐ No  
Who will provide transportation? _______________________________________________________________________________

Do all parties understand that the student and family do not necessarily share the same faith or belief systems?  
☐ Yes  ☐ No  
Do all parties understand that despite differing beliefs, all should be respectful and open to learning and observing different faiths?
☐ Yes  ☐ No  
How will you handle differences in faith? (Discussion, taking turns going to services, compromise) ____________________________

Who Pays

When the family goes out to dinner? _______________________________________________________________________________

When the family goes to the movies, bowling, sight-seeing, etc.? __________________________________________________________________

For long distance phone calls made by the student? ______________________________________________________________________

For school activities and sports, when there is a fee? ______________________________________________________________________

For school supplies? _________________________________________________________________________________________________

Personal toiletries? (shampoo, soap, shaving cream, sanitary items) __________________________________________________________________

For school yearbook, graduation cap, and gown rental? _____________________________________________________________________

Who Pays

Remember, AYA students are not expected to pay for food (except for speciality snacks or foods the host family does not normally eat, hot lunch at school if the student does not wish to take a packed lunch from home) gas, tolls, or utilities.

Travel & Holidays

Is the host family planning on traveling during the year?  
☐ Yes  ☐ No  
What are the host family’s plans for holidays, and will the student be expected to participate? __________________________________________________________________

Does the host family observe certain traditions during holidays?  
☐ Yes  ☐ No  
If yes, what are they? _______________________________________________________________________________________________
Student Safety

Is there anything the student should know about the safe or less safe areas of this part of town? ________________________________

Are there any areas to avoid walking in or going to during the day and/or night? □ Yes □ No

If yes, what areas? ____________________________________________________________________________________________

How should an emergency or fire be handled? ___________________________________________________________________________

What are the phone numbers of related emergency services? _______________________________________________________________

  Emergencies: 911

  Police Department: __________________________ Fire Department: __________________________

  Hospital: __________________________________________________________

How does the host family secure the home?

□ Locking all doors and windows □ Alarm system

Are there any special safety precautions that the student needs to take related to closing/locking certain doors, house keys, etc.?
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

If home alone, how should the student handle phone calls or someone at the door? ________________________________

What should the student know about traffic and pedestrian safety? ________________________________

What should the student do if he or she gets lost or doesn't have a key and nobody's home? ________________________________

Are there any activities, people, or places the student should avoid? ________________________________

What should the student do if he or she is out with friends and finds him/herself in an unsafe situation? (underaged drinking, drugs, risky behaviors)
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Are all parties aware that drinking alcohol is strictly prohibited according to U.S. law and AYA program rules and is not permitted under any circumstance, in or outside of the home? □ Yes □ No

Are all parties aware that AYA is a non-smoking program and that students are prohibited from possessing or smoking cigarettes while on-program? □ Yes □ No

Have all parties been made aware of safety precautions related to sexual abuse and exploitation? □ Yes □ No

What should the student do if he or she is ever the subject of any type of misconduct, physical, sexual, or otherwise, including lewd or inappropriate solicitations via phone, text, email, or social media communication?
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Other Household Guidelines

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Thinking critically about a situation is the key to understanding what is going on. It is important to think about all sides of a situation, and to consider the feelings or reasoning of others in order to live together happily and resolve any conflicts that might arise. Even the happiest, most well adjusted families and friends have disagreements. Conflict is part of life and leads to learning and growth if handled respectfully. However, if you do not know how to deal with it, conflict can cause a lot of stress. Below are eight questions that, if answered honestly and completely, will help you have a productive and successful conversation to resolve any type of conflict, even within yourself!

This is a process you can go through by yourself to prepare for a conversation, or you can go through these questions with someone to think through a problem together.

1. **What is the problem?** Identify what is bothering or concerning you. Keep it simple.
2. **What do you want?** State your ideal outcome. What would “fix” this for you?
3. **Why is that important to you?** State your reasons for being concerned about this.
4. **What is working?** Start with the basics. Identify the parts of the situation you are OK with. List things you have tried that have helped the situation.
5. **What is not working?** State the specific action or behavior that is bothering you or that you are concerned about. List the things you have tried that have failed to help the situation.
6. **What is possible and realistic?** Be honest with yourself. State the realistic changes that could happen.
7. **What will you do next?** Identify an action you can take or a person you can talk to that will help or make progress with this issue.
8. **By when?** State a specific time you will do this action or have this conversation and stick to it

**Examples**

**Situation:** My host family is very nice, but they have a curfew in place that I disagree with. Their rule is that I have to be home by 9pm on week days and 11pm on weekends, and I find it really frustrating! I have told my Local Coordinator about it, but nothing has changed. I want a new host family.

**What is the problem?** I do not like that I have a curfew.

**What do you want?** To not have a curfew anymore.

**Why is that important to you?** Because I am trying really hard to make friends here, and I cannot see them if I have to be home so early.

**What is working?** On week days it is usually OK. I make most of my plans with friends on weekends.

**What is not?** When I do not have plans, it does not matter as much, but when I am out it is so hard to do anything and get home in time. I feel like I am always watching the clock.

**What is possible and realistic?** If I have to have a curfew, it could be later on the weekends. Or, if I talk with my host family before I go out, I can arrange a time to be home that I am able to enjoy my time with my friends.

**What will you do next?** I will speak to my host family. I will ask if they will compromise with me on my weekend curfew, and I will listen to them during the conversation.

**By when?** I will talk to my host family this weekend.
Situation: I am having trouble making friends. I have been here for several weeks and still feel like I have not made any close friends. People are nice to me, but we do not hang out outside of school, and it is different than it was at home. I miss my friends and family from back home.

What is the problem? I am lonely and do not have any close friends here.

What do you want? To make friends I can hang out with on the weekends and outside of school.

Why is that important to you? Because I miss everyone from back home and because I feel like I am not getting a full American experience.

What is working? I sit with people at lunch.

What is not? Nothing is working. I sit with people at lunch, but no one calls me to go out. I have nothing to do after school.

What is possible and realistic? I could call someone to ask to make plans. I could also ask my LC to help me. I could make my own plans afterschool, with activities or clubs.

What will you do next? I will talk to my LC.

By when? I will call her today after school.

Your turn! Try using these critical thinking questions to tackle other common concerns exchange students have.

Situation: My host family lives in a very small, rural town and I am not used to it. There are a lot of farms and the high school is pretty small. I feel like I am living in the middle of nowhere and it is so different from my home country, I do not think I will ever be happy in such a weird situation.

What is the problem?______________________________________________________________________________________________

What do you want?______________________________________________________________________________________________

Why is that important to you?_____________________________________________________________________________________

What is working?_______________________________________________________________________________________________

What is not working?____________________________________________________________________________________________

What is possible and realistic?___________________________________________________________________________________

What will you do next?___________________________________________________________________________________________

By when?_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

Situation: I am having trouble with my grades. I am a very social person, so I like to hang out with friends, but my host family thinks it is interfering with my studies. I do not want to miss out on building friendships, but I also do not want to get in trouble for low grades.

What is the problem?____________________________________________________________________________________________

What do you want?_______________________________________________________________________________________________

Why is that important to you?_____________________________________________________________________________________ 

What is working?_______________________________________________________________________________________________

What is not working?____________________________________________________________________________________________

What is possible and realistic?___________________________________________________________________________________

What will you do next?___________________________________________________________________________________________

By when?_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

46  Academic Year in America
Situation: I live on my cell phone. It is how I keep in touch with my friends and family back home and it is my main source of entertainment. My host family got upset that I spend so much time on my phone, so they set a limit of 2 hours per day that I can use it. I am really mad and want to change host families. This is too strict and unfair.

What is the problem? ________________________________________________________________

What do you want? ________________________________________________________________

Why is that important to you? ______________________________________________________

What is working? ________________________________________________________________

What is not working? ______________________________________________________________

What is possible and realistic? ______________________________________________________

What will you do next? _____________________________________________________________

By when?________________________________________________________________________

Situation: I have heard that Americans do not eat healthy foods and are mostly overweight. I have decided to become a vegetarian, and will be skipping breakfast so I control my weight while I am here. I want to stay in the shape I came here, so I am being really, really careful about my food, which my host family does not understand or agree with.

What is the problem? ______________________________________________________________

What do you want? ________________________________________________________________

Why is that important to you? ______________________________________________________

What is working? ________________________________________________________________

What is not working? ______________________________________________________________

What is possible and realistic? ______________________________________________________

What will you do next? _____________________________________________________________

By when? _________________________________________________________________________

Situation: My host family goes to church every weekend and I do not want to go. I do not come from a religious household and I am uncomfortable with the idea of weekly services. I have not talked to my host family about this yet, and I am starting to avoid them because I am uncomfortable.

What is the problem? ______________________________________________________________

What do you want? ________________________________________________________________

Why is that important to you? ______________________________________________________

What is working? ________________________________________________________________

What is not working? ______________________________________________________________

What is possible and realistic? ______________________________________________________

What will you do next? _____________________________________________________________

By when? _________________________________________________________________________
**Situation:** My host family has 3 young children and they are really loud and messy. I only have one sister back home, so this is very new to me and it really bothers me. I try to help clean, but the little kids leave their toys everywhere and my host parents do not seem to care. I have decided to stay in my room because it is the only space I can have some quiet, and now my host mom is getting upset with me for not spending time with the family.

What is the problem? ______________________________________________________________________________________________

What do you want? ______________________________________________________________________________________________

Why is that important to you? ______________________________________________________________________________________

What is working? __________________________________________________________________________________________________

What is not working? ______________________________________________________________________________________________

What is possible and realistic? ______________________________________________________________________________________

What will you do next? _____________________________________________________________________________________________

By when? _______________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Situation:** I like to spend time in my room to study, listen to music, text my friends, and go online. My host family keeps telling me they want me to spend time with them, but this is what I have always done at home. I like my host family, and I do not understand why they are so upset that I spend time in my room.

What is the problem? ______________________________________________________________________________________________

What do you want? ______________________________________________________________________________________________

Why is that important to you? ______________________________________________________________________________________

What is working? __________________________________________________________________________________________________

What is not working? ______________________________________________________________________________________________

What is possible and realistic? ______________________________________________________________________________________

What will you do next? _____________________________________________________________________________________________

By when? _______________________________________________________________________________________________________


Situation: 

________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

What is the problem? ____________________________________________________________

What do you want? _____________________________________________________________

Why is that important to you? _________________________________________________

What is working? _____________________________________________________________

What is not working? __________________________________________________________

What is possible and realistic? ________________________________________________

What will you do next? ________________________________________________________

By when? ____________________________________________________________________

Situation: 

________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

What is the problem? __________________________________________________________

What do you want? _____________________________________________________________

Why is that important to you? _________________________________________________

What is working? _____________________________________________________________

What is not working? __________________________________________________________

What is possible and realistic? ________________________________________________

What will you do next? ________________________________________________________

By when? ____________________________________________________________________
## Rights vs. Privileges Quiz

Please indicate whether you think the expectations below are your right to be provided as an exchange student or a privilege. A right is something that is guaranteed to you, and privileges are opportunities that are earned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Privilege</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living with a caring host family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in a suitable home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being enrolled in a high school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being provided 3 meals a day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch money for hot lunch at school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own bed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being provided with a place to study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in school sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving a high school diploma</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Driver’s Education course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Trips with host family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement in grade level of choice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer usage for social purposes (Skyping with friends)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Internet access at home</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Going out with friends during the week</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participating in graduation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Your own bathroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being driven to school by your host family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation to and from social activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation to and from school and religious services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying out late with friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable access to internet or phone to contact AYA, LC, natural parents, or DOS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having every meal prepared for you by your host family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Returning Home

As you begin to prepare for your trip back home, many of you may begin to experience anxiety or stress about returning home, known as reverse culture shock (RCS) or re-entry shock. AYA wants you all to understand that this is completely normal and that an adjustment will also need to be made after you return to your home country. Please review the following information on RCS.

Here are examples of what some of you may be feeling before you return home:

- Excited to be going home but sad that host family is making plans beyond your stay
- Tendency to withdraw from the host family; it may seem easier to say goodbye if you do not feel as close to your host family
- Confused that the host family may be pulling away from you

Here are some examples of what some of you may feel after you return home:

- Honeymoon period initially when returning home; it is so great to be back and see everyone
- Tendency to compare everything to the U.S.; others are not interested in these comparisons
- Homesick for the U.S.

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. Here 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?

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.
- For many, RCS can be much more difficult than initial culture shock.
- RCS is different for everyone; the more intense the overseas experience, the more difficult RCS can be.
- RCS cannot be avoided, but it can be managed.
- RCS affects both the student and the host family before and after the student departs.

Why does RCS occur?

- People and places have changed.
- You have changed and see things with new eyes.
- There is a gap in information; life did not stand still, waiting for you to return.
- People may not be as interested in hearing about your experiences as you are in sharing them.
- Few expect to have trouble adjusting to home and therefore do not prepare.

How do I manage RCS?

- Recognize the symptoms of RCS.
- Prepare yourself by thinking about how you dealt with culture shock.
- Communication; talk to your host family and discuss your departure.
- Keep in touch with family and friends back home (within reason).
- Take some time to consider how you have learned, changed, and grown from the experience.
- Compare both cultures; consider what aspects of American culture you would like to take home with you.
- Bring closure to your experience; say “goodbye” and “thank you,” make a scrapbook with your host family, and make plans for continuing your relationship.
Complete the following sentences with your own words. You may write whatever comes to your mind.

1. **When I think of leaving, I feel:**

2. **For me, America means:**

3. **The things that I will miss are:**

4. **The things that I will be happy to leave behind are:**

5. **When I talk to other exchange students about leaving, they:**

6. **When I talk to my American friends about leaving, they:**
7. For me, the easiest part of leaving will be:

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

8. The most stressful part will be:

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

9. When I think of returning to my country, I feel:

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

10. I will return to the following people and activities:

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

11. I think my family will expect me to:

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

12. I expect that my friends at home will:

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

13. I think that the hardest part of coming back will be:

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________
14. I think that the easiest thing for me to handle when I come home will be:

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

15. I am really glad that:

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

16. I will say thank you to my host family, friends, and Local Coordinator by:

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

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Adapted from: Going home: A Workbook for Reentry and Professional Integration, Developed by Martha Denney, NAFSA, 1986
# Rights vs. Privileges Quiz Answers

**Answer Key and Explanations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Privilege</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living with a caring host family</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in a suitable home</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being enrolled in a high school</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being provided 3 meals a day</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch money for hot lunch at school</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own room</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own bed</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being provided with a place to study</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in school sports</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving a high school diploma</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver’s Education course</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Trips with host family</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement in grade level of choice</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer usage for social purposes</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet access at home</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going out with friends during the week</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in graduation</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own bathroom</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being driven to school by your host family</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation to and from social activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation to and from school and religious services</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying out late with friends</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable access to internet or phone to contact AYA, LC, natural parents, or DOS</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having every meal prepared for you by your host family</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Explanation of Rights and Privileges:

- **Living with a caring host family:** You have the right to be with a caring host family that will welcome you as part of their family and invite you to participate in all aspects of family life. Your host family will fulfill all the provisions required by AYA and help you to succeed and enjoy a year or semester in America. It is important to remember that each host family is different, and your American host family may not demonstrate affection in the same way that your natural family does back home. Each family dynamic is unique, and you will need to be patient. It may take some time to become fully integrated into the family.

- **Living in a suitable home:** You have the right to be with a host family that provides you with a safe, sanitary, and suitable home. AYA host families are screened, and we work to ensure that they will provide you with suitable sleeping and living arrangements that meet AYA and Department of State regulations.

- **Being enrolled in a high school:** You have the right to be enrolled in an accredited public (or private, if applicable) school while on the AYA program. Students enroll in full course loads and must maintain a C+ grade point average in every class.

- **Meals:** You have the right to be provided with three quality meals per day. If you wish to purchase a hot lunch at school this is considered a personal expense and you will be responsible for paying for it. Your host family is only obligated to make sure that there is food in the home and that it is available to you. For example, a lot of host families will provide you with different breakfast options – like toast, spreads, cereal, cereal bars, etc. This means that you may have to prepare some of your own meals, including packing your own lunch for school.

- **Sleeping Arrangements:** You have the right to be provided your own bed – however, it is a privilege for you to be given your own room. If you are sharing a room, it is regulation that you do not share a room with more than one other child of the same gender who is relatively close to your age.

- **Bathroom:** Being provided with your own bathroom is a privilege, and many American families share one or two bathrooms amongst each other.

- **Mobile Phone:** Being given a mobile phone is a privilege. In fact, host families are discouraged from adding students onto their family or individual phone plans. If you would like a mobile phone, it is your responsibility to obtain one and pay whatever fees are required to maintain that phone throughout the year or semester. If your host family is kind enough to provide you with a phone or add you to their plan, you must reimburse them for the costs incurred.

- **Be provided with a place to study:** You have the right to be provided a quiet place to study – this can be a desk in your room or quiet places in your host family’s home, like the kitchen table or living room.

- **Sports and other high school events:** Your ability to participate in sports varies from school to school. AYA does not guarantee you the right to participate in sports. AYA does not guarantee grade assignment, a receipt of a diploma, or participation in graduation ceremonies to any of its students.

- **Driver’s Education course:** This is a privilege, as driver’s education programs vary from state to state. Under recent changes in many state laws, foreign students are not able to obtain a U.S. driver’s license. If your state permits you to obtain a license, you must pass an accredited driver’s education program and obtain permission from your host family and natural family to take this course. You may NOT drive while enrolled on the AYA program, except with a driving instructor DURING a driver’s education course. You may need to purchase additional private insurance depending on the course.

- **Taking trips with host family:** It is a privilege to go on trips with your host family. Your host family is not responsible for planning or taking you on trips – it is encouraged for you to take advantage of the activities and sights in your community.

- **Internet access at home:** It is your right to be provided with reasonable access to internet or phone. This means that if necessary, you will be able to contact AYA, your LC, your natural parents, or the Department of State. It is a privilege, however, to have internet access in your home – if you do not have internet access in your home, you can use your school internet or a public library. It is also a privilege to use the computer for social reasons such as Facebook or other social media sites.

- **Going out with friends:** It is a privilege to be able to go out with friends during the week and stay out late with them. Every host family has different rules about being able to go out with friends during the week and weekends, and you will most likely have a curfew time when you are expected to return home. It is important that you follow these rules.

- **Transportation for social activities:** Host families are expected to provide transportation to and from some activities – with proper planning done by the student. It is your responsibility to arrange transportation to extracurricular school activities or outings with friends if you do not provide proper planning to your host family, or if they are unable to accommodate your schedule. You can speak to your host family and give them advanced notice about your plans to determine if they will be able to provide transportation. You can also carpool with your friend’s family to events.

- **Transportation to and from school and religious services:** It is your right to have transportation to and from school; this means a way of getting to school that can include riding a bicycle, walking, taking a school bus, or being driven by a host parent or sibling. Many of our students take the school bus or walk to school. It is also your right to be provided transportation to religious services if you choose to attend.
Reprint from the Code of Federal Regulations

PART 62—EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM


2. Section 62.25 is revised to read as follows:

§ 62.25 Secondary school students.

(a) Purpose. This section governs Department of State designated exchange visitor programs under which foreign secondary school students are afforded the opportunity to study in the United States at accredited public or private secondary schools for an academic year or semester (or quarter equivalency) duration; and

(b) Program eligibility. Secondary school student exchange visitor program sponsor is limited to organizations:

(1) With tax-exempt status as conferred by the Internal Revenue Service pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; and

(2) Which are United States citizens as such term is defined in § 62.2.

(c) Program activity. Secondary school student exchange visitor programs designated by the Department of State must:

(1) Meet all the requirements set forth in this Part and all additional terms and conditions governing program administration that may be promulgated by the Department of State.

(2) Utilize a standard application form developed by the Department of State.

(3) Utilize a written English language summary of the exchange student’s complete academic course work prior to commencement of school, in addition to any additional documents the school may require. Sponsors must inform the prospective host school of any student who has completed secondary school in his/her home country.

(4) Provide the school with a transcript showing the grades received in school unless the school itself has requested, in writing, the placement of more than five students from the sponsor.

(5) Make sure that the student exchange program in the United States is not referred to exchange students; and

(6) Provide exchange students with reasonable access to their natural parents and family by telephone and email.

(7) Maintain, at minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the host family.

(8) Conduct an in-person interview with all host family applicants. The host family application will be used solely for the purposes of determining the basic needs of the exchange student can be met, including three quality meals and transportation to and from school activities.

(9) That host schools are provided contact information on how to identify and report sexual abuse or exploitation; and

(10) That host schools must be in possession of the exchange student’s name, date of birth, sex, US Social Security number, name and telephone numbers (landline and cellular) of the Local Coordinator and area representative, and the telephone number of Department of State’s Designated Exchange Visitor Program (DEVP) toll free emergency telephone number. The identification card must also contain the date of birth of the student, his/her home address, and the number and type of visa issued.


Conflict resolution; procedures for handling and reporting emergency situations; awareness or knowledge of child safety standards; information on identifying and reporting any child or youth abuse or neglect; and

(d) Program administration. Sponsors must ensure that all authorized organizational officers, employees, representatives, agents, and volunteers acting on their behalf:

(1) Are adequately trained. Sponsors must provide a training for Local Coordinators that specifically includes, at a minimum, instruction in:

(2) Utilize a standard application form developed by the Department of State.

(3) Conduct a pre-placement interview with all potential host families and at a minimum must:

(1) Provide potential host families with a detailed summary of the Exchange Visitor Program and its requirements, obligations and commitments to host;

(2) Provide, at time of application by all potential host families. The host family application must be designed to provide a detailed summary and profile of the host family, the physical environment to include photographs of the host family's home and surrounding areas, kitchen, student’s bedrooms, bathroom, and family or living room. Local Coordinator, designated exchange visitor program (DEVP) toll free emergency telephone number. The identification card must also contain the date of birth of the student, his/her home address, and the number and type of visa issued.

(3) That host schools must be in possession of the exchange student’s name, date of birth, sex, US Social Security number, name and telephone numbers (landline and cellular) of the Local Coordinator and area representative, and the telephone number of Department of State’s Designated Exchange Visitor Program (DEVP) toll free emergency telephone number. The identification card must also contain the date of birth of the student, his/her home address, and the number and type of visa issued.

(4) Ensure that the host family is capable of providing a comfortable and nurturing home environment and that the home is clean and

(5) That host schools must be in possession of the exchange student’s name, date of birth, sex, US Social Security number, name and telephone numbers (landline and cellular) of the Local Coordinator and area representative, and the telephone number of Department of State’s Designated Exchange Visitor Program (DEVP) toll free emergency telephone number. The identification card must also contain the date of birth of the student, his/her home address, and the number and type of visa issued.

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(12) That a sponsor representative other than the Local Coordinator, designated exchange visitor program (DEVP) toll free emergency telephone number. The identification card must also contain the date of birth of the student, his/her home address, and the number and type of visa issued.

(13) Maintain, at a minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the host family. At least once during the fall semester and at least once during the spring semester (i.e., twice dur-
sanitary; that the exchange student’s bedroom contains a separate bed for the student that is neither convertible nor inflatable in nature; and that there is adequate storage space for clothes and personal belongings, reasonable access to bathroom facilities, study space if not otherwise available in the house and reasonable, unimpeded access to the house in the event of a fire or similar emergency. An exchange student may share a bedroom, but with no more than one other individual of the same sex.

(25) Is the host family a good reputation and character? By securing two personal references from within the community from individuals who are not related to the potential host family, or who can provide a reference for the sponsor (i.e., field staff or volunteers), attesting to the host family’s good reputation and character?

(6) Ensure that the host family has adequate financial resources to understand hosting obligations and is not receiving needs-based government subsidies for food or housing.

(7) Verify that each member of the host family household 18 years of age and older, as well as any new adult member added to the household, or any member of the host family household who will turn 18 years of age during the exchange student’s stay in that household, has undergone a criminal background check (which must include a search of the Department of Jus-

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Dear Secondary School Student:

Congratulations on your participation in the Exchange Visitor Program! On behalf of the U.S. Department of State, I want you to know that your decision to come to the United States is important to us. We want your stay to be a positive and memorable experience for you.

As a secondary school student, you are part of a U.S. Department of State cultural exchange program in which you, like thousands of other students from around the world, will have the opportunity to share your language, culture and customs with your American host family and the broader local community. Your participation in this program fosters a greater understanding between our countries.

You are a valued guest in the United States, and we want you to succeed in this program. Your goal should be to learn as much as you can about American customs and culture and to build strong relationships with your host family, new classmates, and new friends. You will be living with a host family and attending a new school, both of which may have different rules and ways of life from what you are used to, so keeping an open mind will be very important to your success.

You and your host family have agreed to follow the program rules that govern the secondary school student exchange program. We hope you have taken the time to review the program rules carefully and that you understand your rights and responsibilities.

Your U.S. sponsor is your first point of contact throughout your stay in the United States. Your sponsor is identified on your Form DS-2019, Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Program (J-1) Status. If you have any questions about your exchange program, if you need assistance of any kind while you are here, or if something just does not feel right to you, immediately contact your U.S. sponsor. It is your sponsor’s responsibility to help you with any problems, needs, or concerns you may have. Your U.S. sponsor should have given you an emergency telephone contact number in your program orientation materials. This telephone number should be available to you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If you have concerns or issues that your U.S. sponsor has not resolved or you find you cannot reach your sponsor, please contact the Department of State through our J-1 Visa Emergency Helpline (1-866-283-9090), which is also available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or by e-mail at JVisas@state.gov.

We are pleased that you made the decision to participate in the Exchange Visitor Program and hope that you enjoy your stay in the United States.

Sincerely,

G.K. Saba
Director, Policy & Program Support for Private Sector Exchange
Emergency Contact Information

Please complete the following worksheet with your host family and/or Local Coordinator. It is important that you keep emergency contact information with you at all times.

AYA National Office: 800.322.4678 | AYA Emergency Hotline (24/7): 800.926.2506 | Email: studentsupport@aifs.org

Your Host Family:

me: ______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Home Phone: ____________________ Mobile Phone: ____________________________ Email: __________________________________

Your Local Coordinator:

Name: ____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Home Phone: ____________________ Mobile Phone: ____________________________ Email: __________________________________

Alternate Emergency Contact:

Name: ____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Home Phone: ____________________ Mobile Phone: ____________________________ Email: __________________________________

Local Police:

Emergency: 911
Non-emergency: ____________________________ Local Fire Department: ____________________________

Local Urgent Care Clinic:

Name: ____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Phone: __________________________________

Local Hospital:

Name: ____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Phone: __________________________________

Other resources:

U.S Department of State Emergency hotline: 1.866.283.9090
National Sexual Assault Crisis Hotline: 800.656.HOPE (4673)  (FREE & CONFIDENTIAL)
We bring the world together.

1 High Ridge Park,
Stamford, CT 06905
Toll free: 800.322.HOST (4678)
Direct: 203.399.5417
www.academicyear.org