



# A GUIDE FOR HOST FAMILIES



ROTARY INTERNATIONAL



## **Definitions**

### **Outbound student**

A term applied by sending districts to students they support for an exchange in another country.

### **Inbound student**

A term applied by host districts to students they receive from another country for an exchange.

### **Sending district**

The Rotary district in the student's home country that facilitates the exchange to another country.

### **Host district**

The Rotary district that receives a student from another country.  
Host families work closely with the host district.

### **Host club**

The Rotary club that supports the student during the course of the exchange.

### **Host counselor**

Member of the host club appointed to serve as the exchange student's main contact with the club and to act as a liaison between the student, club, host family, and community. This individual must not be a member of the student's host family.

### **Youth Exchange officer**

A Rotarian appointed or elected to hold an office on a district or club Youth Exchange committee. Selected by the district governor, the district Youth Exchange chair oversees activity related to the program throughout an entire district.

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*This guide serves as a general introduction to Rotary Youth Exchange and provides an overview of host family expectations and responsibilities. Detailed information should be covered during orientation sessions arranged by local Rotarians. It is recommended that you attend all sessions to fully understand the integral role of the host family in the Youth Exchange program.*

# Introduction

A host family is a vital part of the cultural exchange, immersing the student in a variety of activities while in the host country. The host family plays a large role in offering the student a view of another country and gains the opportunity to learn about a new culture from a young leader. The following information will help prepare host families willing to explore the challenge of welcoming a student into their home for a meaningful exchange.

Hosting is a tremendous experience in which you can share in a young person's hopes and dreams and develop a lifelong connection with a student and family from another country. It can be challenging to help a young person transition to a new culture and ease into the surroundings but the rewards are immeasurable.

Host families in the Youth Exchange program come in all shapes and sizes. They can be Rotarians or non-Rotarians, and may include young children, older children, or no children at all.

# Rotary and the Youth Exchange program



## What is Rotary?

Rotary clubs are service organizations that strive to improve the quality of life in their communities, promote high ethical standards in all vocations, and help build goodwill and peace.

There are over 33,000 Rotary clubs in the world. Club members, called Rotarians, are business, professional, and community leaders who volunteer their time and talents to serve others. Rotary Youth Exchange is one of their service activities.

A district is a group of Rotary clubs that are linked for administrative purposes. Sometimes districts join together to form multidistricts that coordinate exchanges in a larger geographic area.

Rotary International, as the association of Rotary clubs throughout the world, encourages clubs and districts to undertake Youth Exchange activities and offers support through publications and administration relevant to every Rotary district. Districts operate their Youth Exchange programs independently of RI but within a policy framework that supports student safety and well being.

The Youth Exchange program is distinctive because it is operated completely by volunteers around the world. Each district arranges its own exchanges with other districts. Host families are screened, interviewed, selected, and supported by their respective club or district. As a host family, you should be in close contact with members of your local Rotary club and district.





## What is Youth Exchange?

Each year, about 8,000 students from over 100 countries and geographical areas participate in exchanges through the Youth Exchange program. There are three types of exchanges:

- **Long-term:** This exchange is open to students ages 15-19 and usually lasts 10-12 months. The student lives with more than one family in the host country and is required to attend school. Long-term exchanges may be extended to include all or part of the holiday/vacation periods immediately before or after the academic year.
- **Short-term:** This exchange is open to students ages 15-19 and ranges from several days to several weeks. It often takes place when school is not in session, and usually does not include an academic program. Short-term exchanges typically involve a Rotary district-organized exchange of a son or daughter between two families, but they may also take the form of international youth camps or tours that bring together groups of students from many countries.
- **New Generations:** This specialized short-term exchange lasts from three weeks to three months and is open to young people ages 18-25. This program may include a vocational element.

# Requirements of the host family

## What is expected of a host family?

Hosting a student can be an extremely rewarding experience for everyone in the family, yet it is a role that requires a lot of responsibility. Host families are to meet the following expectations:

### Before the student arrives

- Participate in training and orientation sessions offered by the club or district.
- Establish communication with the student.
- Understand the program rules that the student must follow.
- Know how to contact key Rotarians involved in Youth Exchange and community services in case of an emergency.

### During the exchange

- Provide a safe and welcoming environment for trust and friendship to develop between the student and your family.
- Support and make the student feel like a part of the family, with the same privileges and obligations.
- Gently encourage the student to learn and adopt most of the ways of your household.
- Provide room and board for the student. All students must have their own bed. If the student must share a room, it should be with a child of the same gender and similar age.
- Provide a place in the home where the student may study in private.
- Recognize the student's birthday and other special occasions.
- Ensure the student knows how to contact family members, friends, and other support networks.

- In case of an emergency, know how to access and use the student's travel insurance policy.
- Voice any concerns and questions regarding the student to the Rotarian host counselor, including serious homesickness, difficulty adapting to family life or school, or illness.
- Maintain close contact with the host club, and address problems and concerns quickly.
- Exercise supervisory and parental responsibility to ensure the student's well being.
- Encourage involvement in community life by introducing the student to neighbors, friends, and local groups.
- Teach the student about the local culture, and learn about the student's culture.
- Advise the student about matters related to school, family, community functions, and friendship.

### **How long will the student be living with my family?**

Most long-term exchange students live with two or three host families during their exchange. This means the student may live with you for anywhere between three and six months.

### **Are host families paid?**

No. However, in some countries, you may be entitled to a tax deduction. Please check with your government to see if you are eligible.

Some anxiety is to be expected if you have never hosted an exchange student. Be sure you are comfortable with the idea before committing to serve as a host family. If you have serious reservations, feel that you cannot meet your obligations, or do not have adequate answers to your questions, please contact a local Rotarian.



# Youth Exchange Students

## What rules are exchange students expected to follow?

Students are expected to

- Learn and follow the family's rules
- Follow the local laws and customs in the exchange country
- Refrain from driving or operating a motorized vehicle of any kind
- Abide by Rotary International and district- and club-specific rules

District and club rules will be explained in orientation sessions. Host families are encouraged to establish rules and expectations early in areas such as:

- Normal household routines, including meal times, bedtimes, and study hours
- Curfews
- House keys
- Emergency procedures, including phone numbers
- Local transportation
- Snacks and meals
- Religious practices
- Inviting friends home
- Phone and computer use





## **What are the consequences if a student breaks a rule?**

Within your home, you should set consequences for the exchange student as you would for your own child. Make sure that the rules and consequences are very clear to the student. If problems arise or a student breaks a rule, it is the responsibility of the host family to contact the club or district Youth Exchange officer to share any major issues that arise. In extreme cases, the host club and district may decide that it is best for the student to return home early. The final decision regarding a student's early return is made by the governor of the host district in consultation with the district Youth Exchange committee.

## **What is my role with the exchange student's school?**

All long-term exchanges require students to attend a full academic program. As the host family, you are expected to ensure that the student becomes acclimated to a new school. Understand that the student may be coming from a vastly different educational system and may need some guidance about local school procedures. For this reason, the first host family should consider visiting the school counselor with the student to tour the grounds and ensure that he or she is comfortable with the class schedule.

Advise the student against taking a rigorous course load while adjusting to a new culture, language, and school. Make sure the student knows the way to and from school, transportation options, and the procedure for getting lunch.

## **What challenges might the student experience during the exchange?**

- Homesickness
- Language difficulty
- Challenges making new friends
- Difficulty interpreting culture-specific social cues
- Host-family conflicts
- Different rules and expectations from their home
- Various emotional difficulties

## **How will I know when the student is facing these difficulties?**

- Does not seem to be learning the language of the host country
- Does not talk about new friends or positive activities
- Spends excessive time alone
- Calls home frequently or spends too much time online
- Becomes irritable or has angry outbursts
- Becomes anxious or depressed
- Does not perform well in school

## **What should I do?**

- Talk to the student about the signs you are seeing.
- Ask open-ended questions, allowing the student to talk freely.
- Help the student find activities to become involved in.
- Offer or help arrange for additional language assistance.
- Encourage the student to talk to the Rotarian host counselor.
- Notify the student's host counselor if the student is encountering any exceptional problems such as illness, significant difficulty adapting to the host family or school, anxieties about family matters, or serious homesickness.

## **How are students selected?**

Students who demonstrate flexibility and an open mind, have an above-average academic record, and are involved in community and extracurricular activities are encouraged to apply. All students who meet these qualifications, including children of Rotarians and candidates with disabilities, are urged to consider the program.

Though the application process varies from district to district, students generally apply through their local club and complete a series of written applications coupled with an interview process.

## **What is covered during the student's orientation sessions?**

The sending and host districts will provide orientation sessions for exchange students before and after their arrival in the host country. The goal of these sessions is to explain the program's expectations for the students and prepare them for their time abroad.

## **What obligations do exchange students have to Rotary?**

Students are expected to prioritize Rotary functions, such as club or district meetings, above other extracurricular and host family activities. They will be asked to give speeches at Rotary events detailing their exchange experiences. Host families may be invited to Rotary functions; your attendance may help the student feel more comfortable. Ask local Rotarians about the events your student is expected to attend, and ensure that the student prioritizes them.

## **How can I best prepare to host a student?**

Before the exchange, learn as much as you can about the student's culture, which may help prevent misunderstandings. Also, think about which aspects of your culture you would like to share with the student, such as types of food, entertainment, and local places of interest.

In addition, contact the student and his or her parents as soon as Rotarians provide the student's name and contact information. You may extend a welcome and tell them about your family. The student may also appreciate your input on what types of clothing to bring and information about your community.



## **How should I welcome the student into my country?**

A member of the student's first host family should join Rotarians at the airport upon the student's arrival.

Many host families arrange an informal welcome party for the exchange student. Though students enjoy these gatherings as an excellent way to meet family friends and community members, consider holding this event at least a week after the student has arrived. Many students find it overwhelming to have a welcome party immediately after they get off the plane. The student may be very tired and need a few days to recover from jet lag.

Host families should be prepared to discuss household rules with their student. This conversation is often best accomplished using the "first-night questions" offered by many districts. Examples of these include "Should I wash my own clothes?" and "May I help myself to food and drink at any time, or should I ask first?" Some families expect everyone to share tasks such as bed making and house cleaning, while some do not. It is best to cover these issues soon after the student has arrived.

## **What if the student doesn't speak my language well?**

Most students have a basic knowledge of the host country's language, but book knowledge often does not prepare them for daily language use. Be open to potential misunderstandings and frustrations that may accompany communication with the student. Speak slowly, avoid using idioms, and be patient.

Make sure that the student understands important information, such as household rules, school issues, and transportation options. Do not hesitate to ask the student to repeat information back to you, and encourage the student to ask for clarification. As you help conquer the language barrier, you will be able to take great pride in the student's accomplishments and will likely create an especially close bond that will last for many years.

## **How can I help the student adapt to my country?**

It is common for students and host families to have misconceptions of each other's cultures. What you may consider to be rude or unacceptable may be normal behavior in the student's culture and vice versa. It is important to communicate clearly with your exchange student about any cultural misunderstandings. Your district may also offer intercultural orientation to address such concerns.

Try to treat the student as a member of your family rather than as a guest. Also, think of how you would like your own child to be treated on an exchange, and implement these ideas in your home.

Host parents are encouraged to have students address them with an informal title, such as "mom" or "dad," so they feel part of the family. Find a title that both you and the student are comfortable with. Developing a strong relationship will ensure a positive experience for everyone.

## **How do I learn about my student's medical history and needs?**

The host district will have the student's recent medical history with the application materials. You should be informed of any special medical needs, such as medications, allergies, dietary requirements, and prescription glasses or contact lenses.

Students are required to have their own medical insurance. Ask for a copy of this policy and any additional medical documentation to keep on file while the student is living with you. Host families are not responsible for exchange student medical expenses.

Students may have special dietary needs related to health, religion, or personal preference. Encourage them to try new foods, but always respect their preferences, and do not force foods upon them.

# The roles of the host and sending districts

## What is the role of the sending district?

Once the student is accepted into the program, the sending district works with the host district to ensure a successful exchange experience. The Rotarians in the sending district will take care of the logistics that accompany the exchange. This includes but is not limited to

- Informing the host club or district of the student's travel itinerary
- Arranging an outbound orientation session for students and their parents, covering topics such as financial obligations, rules for the students, parental visits, insurance, what to expect while on the exchange, and preparing for return
- Coordinating a debriefing session when the student returns from overseas

## What is the role of the host district?

The host district is responsible for locating, screening, and supporting host families while aiming to provide students with a positive experience abroad. Other responsibilities of the host district or club include:

### Program administration

- Facilitating discussion of needs and expectations between the host family and the student
- Arranging a monthly allowance for the student (on long-term exchanges only)
- Meeting with the host family in the home before and during the exchange to ensure the student's needs are being met
- Approving travel outside the district (Be aware that your student may have special visa restrictions for travel outside your country.)

## School

- Regularly communicating with the student's guidance counselor and teachers
- Arranging enrollment, paying for tuition, and addressing other educational matters with the local secondary school (for long-term exchanges)

## Training

- Conducting an orientation for inbound students covering topics such as logistics, finances, rules, and parental visits
- Creating and maintaining policies and procedures to protect students from sexual abuse and harassment

## Activities

- Encouraging student attendance at weekly club meetings, fundraisers, and service projects, and student participation in many club events
- Encouraging the student to participate in school and community activities (Before the exchange, Rotarians will learn about the student's interests and should plan to introduce the student to groups involved in related activities.)
- Organizing social and cultural functions for the student

## Student support

- Meeting the exchange student on arrival
- Providing a 24-hour point of contact and a list of local resources
- Maintaining contact with the student and host families during the exchange through the Rotarian host counselor
- Arranging transportation to and from mandatory Rotary club and district events





# Youth protection

## What safety precautions are taken?

Both the host and sending districts must be certified by Rotary International to participate in the Youth Exchange program. The certification program supports student safety by establishing requirements for youth protection and best practices in exchange program operations. All districts adopt the following Statement of Conduct for Working with Youth in addition to developing an extensive district abuse and harassment prevention or youth protection policy.

### **Statement of Conduct for Working with Youth**

Rotary International strives to create and maintain a safe environment for all youth who participate in Rotary activities. To the best of their ability, Rotarians, Rotarians' spouses and partners, and other volunteers must safeguard the children and young people they come into contact with and protect them from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

# How to apply to be a host family

## How do I apply to become a host parent?

Generally, host parents must complete a written application, which includes program rules and requirements, a signed compliance statement, and authorization for reference checks. Because the program is decentralized, however, the application process varies from district to district. Contact local Rotarians for details.



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