

Handout 1: Starting Life as a Family

WHO IS IT FOR?

All family members living in the host home and the AFS student should participate in this activity.

INSTRUCTIONS

Please read this handout carefully and have an overview about this activity before your student arrives.

Decide in advance which family member(s) will explain the “house rules” to your student, who will show them around the house, who will assist them using electrical devices and so on. Be aware that this activity lasts several hours and plan on spending some extra time for follow-up with the student during the first days.

When the student arrives in your home, you will of course have many things to talk about and many questions to ask each other. These questions will help you get to know each other and learn to live together while sharing an intercultural experience. As you know, many of your family’s habits and daily routines may be quite different from those of your AFS student.

Remember that this is a lot of information for your student, especially if shared in a foreign language, and they might be tired both physically and emotionally when they first arrive. Take your time and split this exercise into small tasks that are conducted over several days, ideally following the order shared here. Don’t get impatient if everything is not understood the first time and you have to repeat things several times. This is normal and your patience will be appreciated by your newest family member.

Host families come in all shapes and sizes: not all have kids, some have extended family members living at home, etc. so feel free to adapt this exercise as appropriate for your specific family configuration.

Finally, if you find that your student’s language skills are weak, feel free to revisit certain items later and as often as needed.

1. FAMILY BASICS

- What should your student call you? What do your children (if any living at home) call you? (Mom/Dad or first name, etc.)
- Greeting words and habits vary from culture to culture. What do you say when you first see a family member in the morning, when you come home, when you leave home? Tell your student!
- Should your student have their own key? Show them how to open and lock the doors and which key goes into which lock.
- If possible, add the student’s name on the door/mailbox.



What does your student call their parents at home? Do they feel uncomfortable calling you Mom and Dad right away?

2. HOW WE SHARE OUR SPACE (INTRODUCING THE STUDENT'S ROOM)

- Does your student share the bedroom with siblings or have their own room? Show them where your bedroom is and where your children and other family members sleep and spend time.
- Show your student where they can put clothes, shoes, books, plus how to open the window, close the curtains, turn on the air-conditioning/heating, etc.
- Share with the student the degree to which they may personalize their bedroom by moving the furniture, putting up pictures, etc. and what should be used to place items on the walls (for example, tape, pushpins, nails...).
- In some cultures the bedroom is only used for sleeping, in others it is also where you study and entertain. What are your habits? What do your children do? Show your student where they can do homework, read, listen to music and engage in hobbies.



Encourage your student to tell you whether their family at home lives in a house or apartment, how many people live there, what this place looks like, etc. Do they have photos of this to can share?

3. HOW WE STRUCTURE OUR DAYS

- At what time(s) do family members usually wake up on weekdays and on weekends?
- Do you wake your children up in the morning or do they set an alarm clock? How should your student handle this?
- When do family members go to bed? What time do you expect your student to go to bed on weekdays and on weekends? Do you have rules for this or does everyone do as they like?
- Do you respect certain hours as prayer or quiet times? Which ones and how does the family behave?

- At what time(s) may/should your student...
 - Use the Internet? Are there passwords?
 - Watch TV?
 - Listen to music?
 - Do homework?
 - Other?
- Do you have set times for the activities above? Are all family members free to do as they wish as long as they don't disturb others?
- How do you usually spend the time after dinner? With the family? With friends? Or does everybody go to their room? Let your student know!



Encourage your student to describe to you – over a meal, during a family meeting or just casually – their everyday life in the home culture.

4.HOW WE SHARE MEALS AND FOOD

Typical mealtimes	Weekdays	Weekends
Breakfast	_____	_____
Lunch	_____	_____
Snacks/tea/other	_____	_____
Dinner	_____	_____

- Do you have all or certain meals together with all family members? Which are these? Tell your student if they should be at home for lunch or dinner or get up early enough to have breakfast together.
- Are there fixed seats for every family member at the table? If so, show your student where they should sit.
- Do you have a “dress code” for meals (e.g. no pajamas for breakfast)? If yes, make sure that your student is aware of this!
- Do you thank the person(s) who cooked? If yes, what do you say?
- Ask your student whether they have any food allergy or religious restriction regarding food.
- Show your student what a usual portion is or how much family members normally take from shared dishes.

- What things may your student use in the kitchen (e.g. microwave, stove, dishwasher)? Show them how to use these devices. Should they ask first? What are they expected to contribute to in the kitchen (for example: clearing the table, washing dishes, cooking)?
- May your student help themselves to food from the refrigerator/cupboards between meals? Should they ask first? Show them where to find what!
- May your student take food outside of the kitchen? If yes, to which rooms? How do you handle this with your children?
- Will your student take lunch to school or be given an allowance to purchase lunch from the school cafeteria or similar? Or will they be expected to come home for lunch?
- Who will prepare the lunch (if applicable)?



Ask your student what they usually eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner and what their favorite foods are. Do they have lunch at school or at home in the home country? Which family members participate in meals?

5. HOW WE USE THE BATHROOM

- Show your student where they can put their towel, toothbrush, shampoo, etc. and where they can find towels.
- Explain how they are supposed to leave the bathroom after they are finished (door open or closed; fan, lights, heater off/on, etc.)?
- How long is your student allowed to take a shower? When, how often?
- For girls, explain how to discard used sanitary napkins and tampons. Is there any place to store them?
- Be aware of the fact that toilets and showers might function differently in your student's culture and that they might not be familiar with using yours. Show your student how to use the shower and which articles may be thrown in the toilet and which not. Make sure that they are fully comfortable using the bathroom!
- Which articles are used by all family members (e.g. soap, shampoo, brush)? Which are not?
- Will your student use the family supply of personal toiletries or should they purchase these on their own?



How is this handled in your student's family?

6. HOW WE HELP EACH OTHER WITHIN OUR HOUSEHOLD?

- What do you expect your student to do on a daily basis? Tell them!

- Make the bed
- Keep the bedroom tidy
- Keep the bathroom tidy
- Other:

- How do your children help in the household? Are there any chores you expect your student to do or share with their host siblings? Which ones?

- Take out the garbage/recycling
- Set/clear the table
- Do the dishes
- Yard work
- Walk the dog
- Feed the pets
- Vacuum or sweep the floors
- Other:

- Show your student where to put dirty laundry! How often do you usually wash clothes? Do you expect help with washing, hanging, ironing or folding laundry? Or does someone else do this?
- Is your student allowed to use the laundry machine? If so, please show them how to manage it. Should they ask first?



What are your student's responsibilities in their family home?

7. OUR HOUSE RULES AND HABITS

- Are there any areas of the home in which your student is not allowed? For example, parents' bedroom, cellar, etc.

- Are doors usually closed or open? Should they knock on the door when it is closed?
- Do you wear shoes in the house? Where, where not? Not at all?
- Do you accept smoking in the house or outside? Not at all?
- Do you have a cleaning person or somebody to help in the household? What does this person do? How should your student treat this person?
- What things may your student use around the house? Should they ask first?

- Sewing machine
- Piano
- Stereo
- Other:

- May your student use the phone to talk with friends from school? If so, for how long? At what times? What are the rules for your children?
- What are the rules for making long-distance phone calls? Should your student ask first? Are they expected to pay for each call? Should their parents call back? Do you use voice over Internet (Skype or another program) to call via the Internet?
- What are the family's rules regarding Internet usage? Did your student bring their own laptop or can they use the family's computer? For how long and how often? When? Should they ask first?
- What habits do you have for watching TV or playing video games? When and how often may your student watch TV? Which broadcasts are OK, which are not?
- Do you have other house rules? Think of punctuality, tidiness, etc.



Take the opportunity to ask your student if they have has any additional questions and remember to encourage them to share with you how these issues are normally addressed in the home country.

8. OUR ACTIVITIES WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Is your student allowed to invite friends to the house? If so, at what time(s) and under what conditions? What is OK spontaneously, what should be announced in advance?

Please make sure that this topic is not misunderstood: Of course, your student doesn't need to have a boyfriend or girlfriend. If your student does develop a romantic relationship, however, talk with them about your expectations. Where they can meet, what is appropriate sexual behavior from your perspective, whether you allow them to stay overnight. What do you allow for your own children?

- Do you want to be introduced to your student's friends? Where do your children meet with friends: at school, outside school, at a sports club, at home in the living room, in their bedroom?
- May your student go out with friends at night during the week or on weekends? If so, by what time should they return home? What are the possibilities to get home late? Which information do you expect your student to give you: when, where, with whom, how long, a phone number?
- What would be your position if your student meets a boyfriend girlfriend? Would you accept this? Do you want to know this person? Could your student invite them to your house? How would you handle this with your own children?
- Does the family share certain activities in which your student will be expected to participate? Think of attending sports games, community events, going skiing, etc.
- What role does the larger extended family (grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins, etc.) play for you? Do you expect your student to come and see them on weekends?
- Does the family attend religious services? If so, may or should your student attend them as well?
- If your student would like to attend religious services different from that of your family, how can you arrange for him or her to attend these services, if possible?

9. SAFETY ISSUES

- Is there anything your student should know about safe and less safe areas in the (part of) town where you live? Are there guidelines about where it is safe/unsafe to walk during the day, after dark? Show them on a map!
- How should a fire or other emergencies be handled? What are the telephone numbers of related emergency services? Put a list with important telephone numbers next to the telephone (e.g. police, fire responders, neighbors, relatives and friends living nearby, local AFS volunteers, national AFS office, AFS emergency cell phone).
- Where does your student find first aid supplies in the house?
- How do you secure the home? Lock the doors and windows? When you go out, do you always close the door with the key or only close it by pulling? Show your student what you expect them to do!
- How does your student best safeguard their belongings such as passport, bank cards, traveler's checks, camera?
- If home alone, how should your student respond to someone on the phone

or someone who comes to the door?

- What does your student need to know about traffic and pedestrian safety?
- What should your student do if they get lost in town or if they don't have the house keys and nobody is home?
- What should the student always carry with them (e.g. a copy of their passport, AFS ID card, host family's phone number)?
- Is there anything your student should know about the high school culture, school rules, race relations, other tensions?
- Are there activities, people, places your student should avoid? What should they find out about a party, concert, etc. before deciding to go?
- Does a curfew exist in your town?
- Do you have special recommendations for girls (e.g. going out in twos or in a group, not coming home alone late at night)?
- What is the legal age for drinking alcohol? How is it enforced? What repercussions may result from breaking this law?
- How is alcohol accepted in society? What is normal (e.g. a glass of wine for dinner), what is abuse? How can your student avoid being at a party where people abuse alcohol or other substances? Remember that AFS rules forbid consuming non-prescribed drugs, misusing alcohol, and expulsion from school, all of which can result in an immediate termination of the program. Check with your national AFS organization about any additional rules that may exist.