

IISS HOST FAMILY MANUAL[©]

Institute for International Student Success

www.IISS.co

January

2013

P.O. Box 42
Monroe, VA 24574

www.IISS.co

MWGlobalServices@yahoo.com

(434) 221-1415



INTRODUCTION*

Welcome to the exciting world of international education and international students!**

Thank you for opening up your home or even considering opening up your home to an international student studying at a private Christian school.

Your student is not a traditional “Exchange Student.” Exchange students typically attend a public school in the US for one year to gain exposure to American culture and the US education system, and then they return to the home country to complete their high school program.

Your student, on the other hand, is coming from another country to earn a high school diploma in the US and most likely to apply for college or university in the US. She wants to learn English, American culture, and perhaps something about your Christian beliefs. She is probably not thinking of converting to Christianity, but she is aware of your Christian beliefs and practices as well as the fact that she is attending a Christian school with required Bible classes and chapel services. She knows that you attend church and is willing to attend along with you.

Your love for your student coupled with your Christian life-style and servant’s heart will go a long ways to endearing your student to the Christian faith.

Your student’s parents, most often “Mom,” are often the driving forces behind your student attending a private Christian high school in the US.

There are various reasons why the parents of international students send their child to study at a private Christian school. They generally have a great appreciation for American education, and probably value American education higher than the education available in their own country or they would have kept your student at home.

They also want their child to become very fluent in English and, in most cases, earn a college degree in the US. They believe that the best way for their child to learn English, gain first-hand understanding of the people and culture of the United States, and gain admission to an American college or university is to live with an American family and graduate from an American high school.

Finally, your student’s parents are most often very busy people. Most of the students we work with have parents who are heavily involved in their careers or businesses. Their occupations keep them on the road traveling or busy many hours of the day. Business in China, for example, is often conducted over dinner, at Karaoke, or getting a foot massage together. These are evening activities. Parents often rightly understand that they cannot give their child the care that he or she

* Please note this material is copyrighted and should not be used without express written permission of IISS.

** This Handbook makes various use masculine and feminine pronouns. IISS students can be male or female.

deserves, and they are happy to spend some of the money they are earning and pay you to act as their substitute parent for the next 2, 3, or even more years.

Most parents also trust Christians in the United States to care for and protect their child. If this were not so, they would have not have allowed their child to live with “perfect strangers!”

You can see that hosting a student is actually caring for a great trust that has been placed into your hands!

Hosting an international student will be an unforgettable experience and provide a lifetime of memories for you, your family, and your student. This Handbook is designed to help you make the best of that experience and to help you help your homestay student have the most productive time in your home.

At the Institute for International Student Success, we take seriously our role in supporting you. We have prayed for you and want the best for you and your student.

My wife and I have hosted 6 international students for over six years. I have worked in Christian international education for 25 years and raised 8 children of my own. I have provided support for scores of Christian host families for the past 4 years, and while I would never claim that I have heard it all, I have come to recognize certain patterns in both international students and their host parents. This Handbook is the outgrowth of these experiences. It is a work that will continue to evolve as I gain additional experience. I am certainly open to your comments and suggestions, but most of all, I hope that it helps you and your student truly enjoy and grow through your time together.

Bill Wegert

The Institute for International Student Success (IISS) is a Christian, US-based organization dedicated to supporting students, host parents, administrators, and schools that enroll international students. A growing number of international students are coming to the US to attend high schools. The staff of IISS has over 40 years of combined experience in international education. We support the placement of students in quality, private college-preparatory Christian high schools in locations across the United States. In addition, IISS supports the placement of students into loving and reliable Christian host families who live near private Christian schools. In many cases, our host families have children of their own who attend the school where the international student will enroll. IISS works very closely with schools, host families and agents, and has worked with many satisfied parties in both the US and abroad.

IISS is committed to working closely with you and your local school to ensure that you and your students have the best, most rewarding, and most enjoyable experience possible. Because we do not have regional representatives in all areas of the US, we rely heavily on host families and Christian schools to support the student in his or her academic, social, and personal endeavors.

Christian Schools

Some schools have a great deal of experience enrolling international students; others have enrolled a relatively small number and perhaps for only a short period of time.

In any case, IISS' goal is to support the international enrollment goals and the international programs of our affiliated schools in whatever way we can.

Some things are true of all private Christian school which are authorized to enroll international students. As a Host Parent, it is important that you understand what is required of schools that enroll international students:

- All schools provide a Christian college-preparatory education. Most are accredited by one or more recognized accrediting agencies.
- All schools have been approved to operate a school by the department of education of the state in which they are located.
- All schools have been approved by the **US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)** of the Department of Homeland Security to enroll international students on a "Student" (F1) Visa. The school approval process required a formal application to the USCIS as well as a site visit by a US federal official.
- All schools issue a document called a "SEVIS I-20," which the student uses, along with his Passport, to apply for a "Student (F1) Visa" at a US Consulate in his home country.
- All schools are responsible for "registering" students on F-1 Status each year with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Included in this registration process is providing a current U.S. address for each international student they enroll. They are also responsible to notify the U.S. government if any student fails to attend classes on a regular basis, breaks the law, leaves school, drops below full-time status for any reason, or departs the U.S.

Becoming a Host Family

The first and most important requirement for becoming a Host Family is having a desire to take on a new family member from another country and culture!

This is not a boarding arrangement in which a “landlord” rents a room to a student to earn extra money for the household.

You and your family will be eating, commuting, recreating, relaxing, and living with your student. You should expect to experience some of the same blessings and challenges you now have (or had) with your own children. And because of language and cultural differences, you should also expect to experience some additional blessings and challenges as well!

Hosting an international student will be challenging, exciting, fun, daunting, and frustrating. Each season will give way to the next. You will be living with a person from another language, culture, family, and perhaps religious background. Adjustment for your student and for yourselves may not be easy or painless. That is why it’s called an “adjustment.”

But if you let it, your experience can and will be a valuable learning and growing experience for your whole family and one in which you will make a friend and store up wonderful memories to last a life-time.

If you allow, your eyes will be opened to new ways of thinking, speaking, acting and even eating. Your student’s eyes will be opened as well. This is the heart of international education!

The process for becoming a Host Family varies by school. Some schools are very involved in selecting and reviewing potential host families. In such cases, you will begin by working with your school and by following whatever application and review process the school has established.

Other schools require boy host families and the international agency to work with a local host family placement service-provider that is independent of the school. In such cases, some of the procedures and requirements outlined below may not apply.

In most cases, you will be asked to complete a **Host Family Application** along with submitting pictures of your family, your home, your student’s bedroom and bathroom.

Either your school or your agency will ask you to apply for a Criminal Background Check for all family members age 18 or over.

Note: The idea of a **Criminal Background Check** might sound harsh to the ears of dedicated Christians whose primary desire is to minister to an international student. However, this check provides protection for you, your student, your school, and the student’s placement agency. Insurance underwriters stipulate that a background check be required for all host family members age 18 and over. IISS has made arrangements with a professional and credentialed background check company to offer low-cost background checks to potential Host Families.

Once your application, pictures, and background check are reviewed and approved and one or more of your references are checked, your placement agency will work with your school to select a student by matching up your and your student's preferences. Your Host Family Application and family pictures may be shown to one or more prospective student and parents.

When the student and her parents accept your host home, you may be asked to complete a **Host Family Agreement**, which provides you an opportunity to spell out in detail what you expect of your student and what your student can expect of you and your home.

After the initial paperwork has been completed, your agency will forward your Host Family Agreement to the parents of your student for signature. Depending on your location and the policies and procedures of your local school, a school or other representative may visit your home to determine compatibility with your school's standards.

Once you begin hosting a student, the school or an agency representative may also visit your home or contact your student to check up on how he is doing.

Host Families may be asked to complete a monthly **Host Family Report**. This report is completed following a brief interview with your international student, during which time you ask your student certain questions and document the responses. You are also free to ask additional questions of your student to determine his/her level of comfort in your home as well as any particular problems or issues at home or at school that may not have been known or discussed previously.

The Host Family Report will be translated (as necessary) into the language of the student's parents and sent to them for their review. This report provides an opportunity for your student's parents to hear from someone other than the student about the student's progress in the school and in the host home. Due to language and other reasons, parents living abroad will not review the student's "Edline" or other learning community management software, and will thus rely more heavily on the student's reports than an official reports from the school. Host parents can therefore play a key role in monitoring student progress and alerting your student's agency to any problems the student may be encountering at school.

There is no guarantee you will be accepted as a Host Family. Various factors can result in an international student or his parents rejecting a particular host home. However, this should not dissuade a family who wishes to be host home from trying again. One or more of the following may cause the student or his parents to reject a particular home:

- The presence of small children
- The absence of children approximately the same age as the student
- A single parent situation
- Certain pets
- A commute to school that is too long
- The presence of other international students in the home
- The presence of children of the opposite gender in the home
- A host family fee that is too high
- A bedroom located in a basement
- A bedroom without windows
- The presence of guns in the home

Please keep in mind that the “host family” selection process is an un-coerced, free-market decision between a willing student and a willing host family. If either party does not agree, there is no match, a fact which every prospective host parent should recognize.

Tastes and preferences vary considerably among international parents. What is unacceptable to one set of parents may be perfectly fine to another. For this reason, families who desire to be host parents should not be personally offended if their home is rejected by an international student.

Host Family Guidelines

The purpose of this handbook is to facilitate the safety, health, and comfort of international students in an environment conducive to personal growth and academic success. A secondary goal is to minimize unnecessary surprises for the host family when the student arrives. The more students and parents know about the host home and host family in advance, the more likely the transition will go smoothly. The more Host Parents are prepared emotionally and mentally, the less anxious they will be and the more they can focus on caring for their international student.

For this reason, prospective host families should spell out as much information as possible in the Host Family Application and **Host Family Agreement**. Experience indicates that the fewer the surprises, the better the host family-student relationship begins. And a good start is very important to the long-term success of this relationship.

The following items are essential for Host Family Placements and must be provided by the Host Family:

1. **Bedroom** – Most students or parents insist on a private bedroom. This is a very critical consideration that is presumed unless otherwise approved in advance by the student and his parents. While international students are interested in an “American” experience, one element of the American experience, i.e. shared bedrooms among siblings, is not something they (or their parents) generally accept. Exceptions exist, but they are exceptions!
2. **Bedroom Furnishings** - The student’s bedroom must include a minimum of the following: bed, good mattress, sheets, blankets, pillow, bath towel, dresser, closet, desk, lamp, and chair. A study desk, lamp, and chair may be located elsewhere in the home provided the study area offers a quiet workspace. However, since students expect to be able to study privately in their bedrooms, exceptions should be clearly spelled out in the Host Family Application and related photographs.
3. **House Key and Common Areas** – Depending on the local situation, students may be given a house key to use during their stay with the Host Family. The student should also be provided warm and inviting access to all common areas of the home (kitchen, living room, family room, etc.) Students should be encouraged to spend time daily in common areas, particularly meals, with the Host Family.
4. **Bathroom** – Whether the bathroom is private or shared is spelled out in the Host Family Agreement. If several family members share a bathroom, host families should arrange a

schedule for morning use to avoid frustration in preparing for school. A cleaning schedule should also be established.

5. **Laundry Facilities** – Many host families expect students to wash and dry their own clothes. Many international students have little or no experience washing, drying, and ironing their own clothes, and may initially need assistance and loving guidance. Some host families may prefer to wash the student’s clothes, towels, and linens with those of the family to save on unnecessary wash machine or small dryer loads. Laundry arrangements are spelled out in the Host Family Agreement.
6. **Meals** – Breakfasts and dinner meals, along with lunches on weekends, must be provided on a daily basis as part of the host family responsibilities. The particular arrangement for lunch meals, including who pays for lunch meals on school days, should be outlined in the **Host Family Agreement**. Most Host Families expect students to purchase meals in the school cafeteria. In some cases, school lunches are included in school fees paid by the student.
 - a. **Food Content** - Food is deeply ingrained in Asian culture in a way that most Americans do not understand. Asians have a 6,000 year history of food. Cuisine, spices, rituals and stories surrounding food are more important to Asian students than to most Americans. Asians prefer rice over wheat or corn, often have little use for milk or bread products, and enjoy meat, seafood, vegetables and fruit. Soup is a regular feature on Asian tables. Perhaps one of the greatest causes of ‘homesickness’ among Asian students is the absence of the familiar tastes, aromas, flavors, and textures of home. Learning to prepare simple Asian-style dishes can be a fun adventure for host families and one that would be greatly appreciated by students from Asian countries. Students may be willing to help shop for certain spices and other items as well as help prepare food in the kitchen.
 - b. **Breakfast** – Breakfast can be hot or cold; self-serve is acceptable provided the host family explains this procedure to the student. The Host Family should show the student around the kitchen, letting the student know where cooking utensils and breakfast foods are kept.
 - c. **Dinner** – Dinner should be a sit-down meal as a family at least 4 or 5 nights a week. Meals should be nourishing and the menus should be varied. On evenings when the Host Family will not be able to sit down to a meal, the student must be provided with a prepared meal. The Host Family can leave prepared foods in the refrigerator for the student with instructions on how to heat dinner.
 - d. **Lunches** – Lunch meals during the week are generally provided at the school. Who pays for school lunches is spelled out in the **Host Family Agreement**.

One complaint among Asian students is the lack of fresh food provided by their host family.

Travelers to China and Korea can see fresh fruit, vegetables, and meat being sold on the streets and in small markets and shops everywhere. The author of this handbook has been to restaurants in China where the chicken and seafood are displayed live in the lobby for customers to choose just before the animals are taken to the kitchen for preparation. Within the next 30 minutes, the food comes to the table. Additionally, after 9 trips and over 3 months traveling in China, the author has never been served a “dessert” other than fresh watermelon or oranges.

This stands in sharp contrast with the Standard American Diet (SAD), characterized by meat, potatoes, bread, pasta, and heavy dessert, and sometimes all that from a can or a frozen package. Hosting an international student can be an ideal time to shift the family diet in the direction of more “fresh” and “whole” foods and less dessert.

7. **Speaking English** – One of the major reasons students come to study in the US (or at least why their parents send them to the US) is to master the English language. Host families must possess English fluency, and English must be the primary language used in the home at all times. Host homes cannot include more than one student from the same country unless approved in advance by the placement agency and by the student’s parents.

Your student should be encouraged and lovingly challenged to speak English at every possible opportunity. On the other hand, it is counter-productive for host parents to try and prevent students from speaking their native language at certain times. Students will naturally gravitate to their native language when around students from their country. This will not compromise their English learning unless it is done in excess, so host parents should not worry if they hear their student talking to friends, either in the US or “back home” in his native language.

Host parents might be tempted to think that students are talking about them when they hear their student speaking in his native language. This is generally not the case, as the students usually have “more important” matters to discuss when they are around their friends. Again, this is not something about which host parents should be concerned about, as long as the student is attempting to master the English language, is congenial and conversant with the host parents, and does not spend an inordinate amount of time in native-language dialogue with friends in the US or back home.

Since the issue of “speaking Chinese” or another language can become a problem with some students, host parents are well advised to talk over guidelines immediately after the student arrives. It is much easier to set a standard before the student develops a habit of spending too much time on the phone, Skype, qq (Chinese version of Facebook), or other modes of communication.

One of IISS’ primary goals is to minimize surprises to students, host families, schools, and parents. We want students to know as much about the host family arrangement as possible before they arrive, and for this reason, we suggest that all important details of the host family arrangement be spelled out in advance.

8. **Arrival of the Student** - Students will arrive at international or regional airport designated by the school several days prior to the first day of classes. The agency will provide the student’s itinerary to the host family, which is expected to pick-up the student unless other arrangements are made. International flights are often delayed. Host Parents should check the airline’s website to verify that the international flight is arriving on schedule.

Host families are expected to meet their student at the airport at the designated time. Parking and other expenses associated with the airport pick-up are to be borne by the Host Family. A sign with the student’s name will help the student identify his host family. A smooth and pleasant arrival with one or more days of relaxation and recovery from “jet lag” is critical for a good start to the Host Family and student relationship.

9. **Transportation** - Host Families generally live no more than 30 minutes' drive from the school and are required to provide safe and timely transportation to and from school each day. Public or school transportation is acceptable provided the student's safety is ensured and the cost is born by the Host Family. If public or school transportation is involved, details are to be spelled out in the **Host Family Agreement**. Public transportation should only be an option if the student travels with another family member or school mate, especially early in the student's time in the US. Host families are expected to accommodate the student's reasonable requests to participate in after-school activities. Any limitations on the host family's ability to permit participation in after-school activities should be outlined in the **Host Family Application** and/or **Host Family Agreement**.

10. **Use of Computers** – Most students will either bring or purchase a lap-top computer for personal and school use. Wireless internet service is required of all host homes. Use of computer technology for communication with the student's friends in the US and back home can be a major factor limiting the student's progress in her academic studies as well as in learning the English language. Computer games often provide an outlet from the stress of school and an escape from the feelings of loneliness that often accompanies homesickness, but can provide a distraction as well.

This issue, of course, is not limited to new arrivals. Excessive gaming and/or internet-based communication can become an addictive problem for students regardless of how long they have been in the US. Host Parents should consider establishing guidelines such as curfew on internet activity, study-time in the family living room or other common area, or "lights-out" at a certain time before the student arrives and should articulate their standards in the **Host Family Agreement**. It is better to establish and communicate a family standard at the onset of the student/Host Family relationship and then relax that standard later than have no standard at the onset and then try to establish one later.

If problems arise in this area, parents should work closely with the International Student Coordinator or other school official in charge of overseeing international students. Host Parents should also report any patterns they are concerned about on the Monthly Host Family Report.

The student's placement agency has direct contact with the student's parents. In many case, parents can bring the necessary pressure to bear on their son or daughter to effect a change of the behavior that is negatively impacting the student's studies.

Here are some practical tips to consider:

- Discuss guidelines early on in your relationship. Your student comes with a certain set of expectations as to what his freedoms will be. Better to clarify expectations in advance rather than attempt to add restrictions once you realize you have a problem on your hands.
- Communicate what you believe the school expects of you in your oversight of your student. If the student realizes that his host parents have the same standard as the school he will understand that everyone is equally serious about his progress. (This may not work if other host families at the student's school have radically different

standards than yours. Be sure that your student will be continually ‘comparing notes’ with his international friends at school. Anticipate this!)

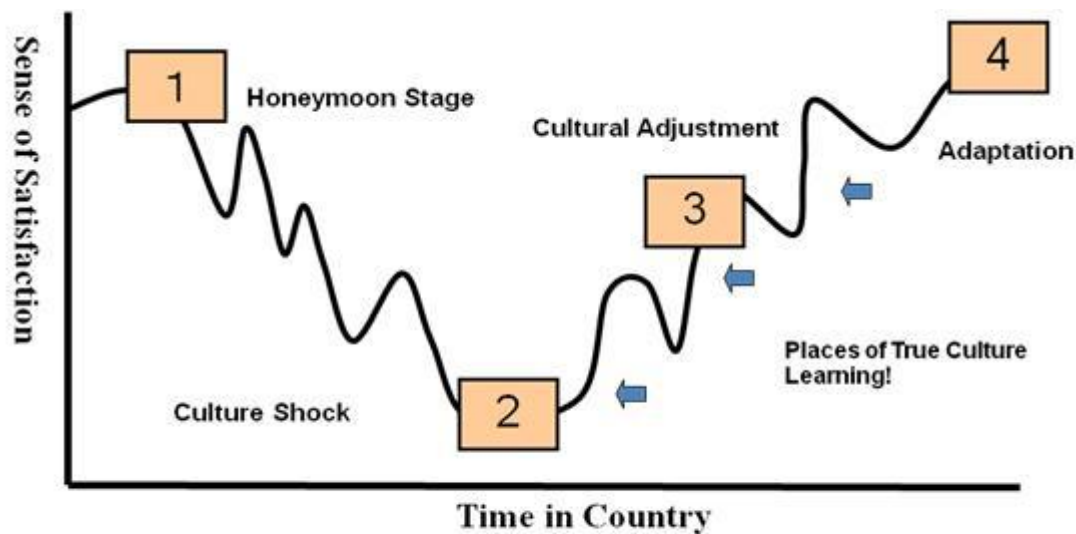
- Consider shutting off the wireless router or having “lights out” at a certain time each weekday evening.
- Reported cases of an international student viewing internet pornography are rare. However, Host Families may want to consider installing a family internet filter if one is not already in place. Another option is [Covenant Eyes](#), which provides with regular reports showing viewing hours and websites visited, along with a rating of each website visited. Covenant Eyes is not filter, but rather tracks and reports on every website visited and sends an email report to an accountability partner (in this case, the host parent). Because this software is installed on your student’s computer, a requirement for Covenant Eyes should be spelled out in the Host Family Agreement.

Student/Host Family Compatibility Issues

Unlike American children who enjoy their high school years living in the comfort of their own homes and sleeping in their own bedrooms, international students move to another continent and take up resident with complete strangers in a brand new country and culture. This can obviously be a traumatic event in their lives! The good news is that most students are very flexible, have positive and congenial personalities, and are willing to put forth the effort to adapt to their new environment. However, these personal traits are not dominant at all times in all students. In other words, “rough patches” are not uncommon and should not be a cause for alarm.

To maximize the likelihood of a successful host family placement, your agency will coordinate closely with the host family, school, and agent to ensure the greatest possible compatibility between the student and the host family. This involves careful review of the Host Family Application and Host Family Agreement. Host families should provide the information necessary for the student’s placement agency to assess compatibility as well as to minimize any surprises after the student arrives.

A “honeymoon” period typically exists for a short time after the student arrives, often followed by true “culture shock” or “the wall.” Students can hit “the wall” when the excitement of their new surroundings has begun to wear off and they awaken to the realities of how far they are from family, friends, food, and everything they know as “familiar.” It is not uncommon for students who hit the wall to start complaining about food, the host family or the school. Parents should not be disturbed, provided the student remains communicative, engaged, and works at getting past this phase. Host parents should acknowledge the adjust process pictured graphically below and be prepared for changes in the student’s attitude, behavior, and level of engagement.



Adapted from "Maximizing Study Abroad", University of Minnesota.

During this time, your school and placement agency may be available to help students and host parents navigate through the process and into the "cultural adjustment phase where the student can adopt a routine and be able to focus on academic studies and congenial relationships with host family members and fellow students.

During cultural adjustment, a student may spend considerable time talking with parents or friends back home, and this should be allowed during the early days of the student's stay.

After the "honeymoon period" is over, other issues may surface that reveal character-related deficiencies or areas of immaturity. Host families may find that a student, particularly if he comes from a wealthy, single-child home, is what we would call "spoiled." Host Parents must deal with selfish behavior with love and firmness, setting, communicating, and enforcing guidelines. The school and placement agency are available to help in such situations. Host Parents should respond to the challenges in much the same way they would deal with their own teenage children in similar situations.

In isolated cases, parents enroll their children in Christian schools and place them in Christian host homes because they realize they have "spoiled" their child and are looking for a solution. They look to Christian parents and teachers to provide the discipline and structure that they, for whatever reason, were unable or unwilling to provide. Chronic behavior problems associated with a child in this situation creates additional challenges for host parents and school officials that will often require the involvement of a parent. We have found that the likelihood of success in remediating behavior problems of this nature is directly proportional to the level of support received from the parents. If the parents take the child's "side" as opposed to supporting the school's or host family's attempts to alter the child's behavior, such attempts are not likely to succeed.

If the parents reinforce the Host Parents' guidelines and standards, the student will often realize she has no alternatives but to comply. However, if the student's parent caters to the child's whims and desires, the host parents may find themselves in a difficult situation. The student's

agency can often detect situations of this nature, and communicate to the parents that their failure to support the host parents will result in the student no longer being allowed to live in the host home.

Finances

Hosting an international student involves time and money. The household's food, transportation, and utility budgets will increase proportionally when taking in an international student.

Parents who send their child to the US to be education in a private Christian school can afford to support their child while enrolled in school. While parents are often very meticulous in accounting for expenses, they have the means to provide for their son or daughter. The parents' financial ability to provide for their child financially while in the US is assessed at 3 levels during the admission process:

1. The student's placement agency reviews the parents' documentation of financial ability before sending the student's admission material to the Christian school.
2. The international student official at the Christian school review the parents' documents before issuing the SEVIS I-20 document the student uses to apply for a Student Visa.
3. The Visa Officer at the U.S. Consulate where the student is interviewed for a Student Visa reviews the student's documents, including financials, before issuing the Student Visa.

The money a host family receives for hosting a student is often referred to as a "stipend." Host family stipends vary by school. While most stipends exceed the actual dollar cost of hosting a student, financial gain cannot be the primary motivation for families to host an international student. One cannot quantify the "cost" of the time, energy, and emotions involved in hosting international students. Neither can the immense benefits be easily quantified.

Any family considering hosting an international student should "count the cost." This Handbook is an attempt to help families assess what is involved in the host family commitment. While single-parents often make excellent host parents, married couples should be united in their desire and commitment to the hosting experience. Couples with significant marital conflicts are advised to refrain from hosting an international student.

1. **Homestay Payments** – Homestay payment can be made in one of several ways, which may have different tax consequences. Below are the three primary ways Host Family payments are made
 - **A US Placement Agency pays the Host Family directly by way of a check made out to the host family.** If the agency is based in the US and pays the host family directly, the agency will ask the Host Family to complete an [IRS Form W-9](#) and also issue an IRS Form 1099 for payments made during the calendar year. The amount of payments will also be reported as income to the US Internal Revenue Service. Host Families are advised to consult a tax professional about keeping records of expenses to offset the gross income reported on the Form 1099.

- **Overseas agency pays the Host Family from abroad.** Overseas agencies may opt to pay Host Families directly from abroad. Host Families who receive payments directly from an overseas agency will need to provide their bank account information to the agency. This information includes the following:
 - Bank name and address
 - Bank SWIFT Code
 - Bank Routing Number
 - Account number

The best way to obtain this information is to contact your bank and explain that you wish to receive an international wire transfer. Most banks can provide a fact sheet with the required information.

- **Agency pays the Host Family by way of a check made out to the student.** This payment arrangement aligns with the idea that the Host Family is acting as a temporary custodian of the student in lieu of the parents. Under this arrangement, payment will be made to the Host Family by the US agency in the form of a check made out to the student. The Host Family will open a “custodian account” for the student at the Host Family’s bank. This will require the student to be present along with his or her Passport, SEVIS I-20, and I-94 Arrival-Departure card. (The student will have all 3 documents after arriving in the US.)

Under the terms of a custodian bank account, the host parents will have complete access to the funds in this account but the student will not. (Note: This is not to be confused with an account set up for the student to have money for personal expenses, toiletries, electronics, etc.)

Host Parents can then take regular drafts from this account to off-set expenses related to food, utilities, transportation, as well as the care they provide to the student. In other words, they can pay themselves a monthly host family stipend from this account, all of which is under their control.

This method does not require a W-9 to be completed, nor will the Host Parents receive a Form 1099 at the end of the tax year. The US placement agency is ostensibly writing a check to the student with funds received from the student’s parents, not paying reportable “income” to a third party.

Host Parents should consult an experienced tax professional for guidance with this and any other payment arrangement.

2. **Student Money and U.S. bank accounts** – International students often travel to the US with US currency, sometimes with rather surprising amounts. Host Parents may wish to assist their student deposit some of these funds into a US bank account. While international high school students cannot legally obtain a Social Security Number, their passport and SEVIS I-20 can be used to set up a bank account in the US. One option is for the Host Parents to set up a joint bank account with the student, with one of the Host Parents as “guardian.” This will allow the student to have and use a Debit Card for personal spending money. Some students come with a credit card or debit card which they use to purchase personal items.

Finances are generally not a problem with students and the details of how the student's personal funds will be spent can be discussed after the student arrives. International placement agencies will often provide suggestions before the student travels, and any questions host parents have about this matter can be answered by the student's agent. Parents who send their high school-age students to the US for study in private Christian schools generally have sufficient funds to ensure their child has sufficient resources for purchasing person items, toiletries, snacks, movie tickets, computer supplies, etc.

Host parents often question how much "control" they should try to exercise over the international student's spending habits. Some international students have extravagant spending habits and what appears to be an unlimited credit or debit card from home. This is a question that is best answered by the student's parent, provided that the student's spending does not become a detriment to the student's study habits, well-being, or relationship with other family members or school mates. Host parents who have questions about this should consult the student's placement agency, who can address such questions with the student's natural parents.

3. **What the Host Family Stipend Covers...and Does Not Cover** – In exchange for the host family stipend, families are expected to provide the following for their international student:

- Food up to 3 meals per day (Provision of school lunches is discussed separately.)
- Housing, including a private bedroom with closet space that is located within the home
- Study space that is well-lit, comfortable, and quiet
- Bathroom access, including a sink, toilet, and shower
- Utilities, including hot water, heating and air conditioning
- Wireless internet
- Transportation daily to and from school with reasonable accommodation for after-school activities
- Laundry facilities, including access to a clothes washer, dryer, and iron
- Access to common areas of the home

Host Parents should consider their student as a member of the family rather than a boarder or renter. A successful host family is one that makes the student feel that he is a member of the family. It is not uncommon for international high school students to want to call their host parents "Mom" and "Dad," terms that will often remain in use long even after the host family/student relationship has ended.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost...**Luke 14:28**

Host family stipends vary by school and geographic region. Families should consider the amount of money they will receive as a stipend against the additional expenses they will incur for food, utilities, and gasoline in providing for the student. With this information, host parents should also consider what, if any, additional expenses that often arise while hosting a student will be covered by the Host Family. These may include the following:

- Meals eaten out at a sit-down restaurant
- Meals eaten “on the run” at a fast food restaurant
- Vacations and family outings (e.g. additional hotel room, restaurant meals, etc.)
- Entrance fees to theme parks, movies, plays, museums, and other venues with admission fees
- Travel to visit family members and friends

Once a decision is made as to who will pay these expenses, host families should discuss this with their student in advance so as to avoid uncomfortable situations when the occasion arises.

In general, host parents should not discuss the Host Family Stipend with their student. The student’s parents have engaged the services of a professional international placement agency to handle such matters and to prevent the student from being involved in such matters. Any questions in this regard should be immediately directed back to the student’s placement agency who will involve other parties as necessary to resolve any issues and answer any questions.

Placement of a student into a home by international placement agency is not a guarantee of a stream of income. The student may fail to arrive as expected, transfer to another school, or request a housing change for reasons beyond the agency’s control. Your student’s agent will make diligent efforts to mediate or arbitrate issues that arise in the host home resulting in student or host parent dissatisfaction. Host parents should keep in mind that the student and parents are, in one sense, paying customer and have certain rights that may result in termination of the Host Family Agreement. Terms for such terminations are spelled out in the Host Family Agreement.

Health and Wellness

The health and wellness of international students is of utmost priority to all parties concerned. Parents place a great deal of trust in host families to look out for their child's safety and well-being. Host parents are expected to take every available means to insure that the international student remains safe and healthy.

1. Medical Exams

International students most often have an immunization record and the results of a recent medical exam record included as part of their application file sent to the school during the admission process. While all schools require an immunization record, schools vary in their insistence on collecting medical exam records.

One reason for this is that in some states (e.g. Virginia), all students, including international students, are required to undergo a complete medical exam by a U.S. licensed physician after they arrive in the US and before attending classes.

Host parents may be required to take their student to a local clinic for a "school exam" soon after the student arrives in the US. Expenses for this exam are paid for by the student, usually with cash the student has brought from home.

2. Medical Insurance

Mandatory accident and illness insurance is an extremely important component of the student's "study abroad" experience.

IISS recommends that any international student policy must provide coverage for no less than \$250,000 per illness or injury. Policies limited to \$100,000 are not acceptable.

All students must be covered by an insurance policy designed specifically for international students studying in the US.

Many reputable insurance companies offer special policies designed for international students studying in the US. With almost 1 million students in the US on "Student Visas," this is a lucrative and readily available insurance market. Insurance is regulated by the states in which policies are sold, and may, or may not, meet the general stipulations of the Affordable Care Act enacted in 2010.

Benefits payable by these policies can vary widely, and **host parents are advised to study the policy their student has before an illness or injury occurs.**

International student insurance plans may offer the following benefits for students who are legally in the US on a Student Visa:

- Benefits for injuries sustained while in the US
- Benefits for illnesses incurred while in the US
- Medical Evacuation of the student back to the home country if ordered by a doctor

- Repatriation of remains in the event of death
- Benefits for prescription drugs
- Some policies also include travel benefits for a “bed-side” visit of a relative from abroad in the event of a serious illness or injury

International student policies often have certain very important restrictions and limitations:

- They do not provide benefits for “pre-existing medical conditions” for a given period of time after the policy is purchased, such as 6 months from the time the policy took effect
- A deductible that must be paid before benefits are paid
- A co-pay for which the student is responsible
- Limited benefits (or none at all) for injuries sustained while playing certain sports or involved in interscholastic (or intramural) athletics
- A cap on benefits payable for a given illness or injury
- A “per day,” “per visit,” and/or a “per service” limit on benefits

All international student policies have a contact phone number and an “insurance card” that can be printed off or copied. Host parents and the student should each keep a copy of the insurance card. Host parents should also ensure that the school has a copy of the insurance card.

After providing treatment, medical providers may ask for full payment and then bill the insurance company for medical services provided. Host parents should discuss in advance with their student who will pay the co-insurance or medical bill should medical attention be needed. The student’s parents are ultimately responsible for payment of medical bills associated with the student’s care.

Health insurance is obtained in one of two ways for international students:

1. Students purchase an **individual** international insurance policy before leaving their home country and travel to the US with an international student medical insurance policy already in place. (In rare instances, a student may need to purchase a policy immediately upon arrival in the US. Host parents should ask their student upon arrival if he or she has an insurance policy.
2. The Christian school has a mandatory **group policy** for international students which is either purchased upon arrival or included in the fees paid to the school.

In either case, Host Parents should always verify the student’s insurance coverage and keep a copy of the student’s insurance card with them at all times.

Other Important Matters

- 1. Cultural and Religious Differences** – Many international students attending Christian schools were not raised in a Christian home and are not familiar with the stories of the Bible. In China, for example, Christmas is growing in popularity as a commercial holiday but it has no reference to the birth of Christ. Chinese students attending government schools are taught evolution and a secular world-view.

Students who are placed into Christian school through a Christian placement agency are made aware of the fact that they will be attending a Christian school and living with a Christian host family. While they may not fully comprehend what this means, they are aware that church attendance, school chapel services, and Bible classes each year are all required.

Host families must respect the cultural and religious beliefs of the student but at the same time are not expected to compromise their own religious or moral convictions. Host families are invited to pique the curiosity of international students by living a servant-oriented Christian life style before them.

As an experienced host parent, the author of this Handbook has been genuinely curious why students think and believe the way they do and what experiences and training have led up to their conclusions about religious, moral, and philosophical matters. Loving, gentle, and respectful conversations on this topic often reveal ways in which the student might be open to learning more about the Greatest Story Ever Told.

As part of the Host Family Agreement, students are expected to attend church along with the host family on Sunday mornings or during the family's primary church attendance time. Experience indicates that when families "require" students to attend more than one church service per week, an unnecessary resistance can develop that works against the goals of both the student and the host family. Students should be invited to participate in youth group activities and other services, but should not be required to attend church more than once per week.

- 2. Household Chores and Duties**

International students enroll in US high schools for the primary purpose of mastering the English language, completing a secondary education and gain admission to a US college or university. They should not be encumbered with household chores that keep them from their studies or necessary rest. On the other hand, host parents will want to inculcate a certain amount of personal responsibility in their student as he matures in their home and under their guidance.

Host Parents should clearly spell out what responsibilities and chores their student is responsible for early in the Student-Host Family relationship. Training, examples, and reminders will be necessary.

Issues that should be discussed include identifying who is responsible for the following and on what time schedule:

- Room cleaning/making beds
- Taking out trash in the room
- Bathroom cleaning
- Laundry
- Ironing of clothes

3. Household Rules

The host family should discuss household rules as early as possible after the student's arrival. Some family rules may indeed be an unpleasant surprise to the student, and therefore expressing such rules in advance is very important to a wholesome host family experience.

The Host Family Application and Host Family Agreement documents are two vehicles whereby a family can express particular rules that may seem normal to God-loving Christian families but may be "foreign" to international students. These may include certain standards of dress, internet "black-out" times, lights-out times, etc.

4. Vacations and Weekend Trips

The host family may choose to take vacations and weekend trips during the time their student is living in their home. The student will probably be very glad to travel with the host family if the trip does not conflict with the student's schedule. Who is paying for expenses should be discussed in advance.

If the student will not travel with the host family, the student will need to be cared for during the parents' absence. In making a decision about whether the student can be left at home, the first concern is the student's safety and well-being. Think "emergency," and then ask this question: What emergencies could arise during the time we are away that could affect the student's health, well-being, and safety, and how would our student respond?

International students should have should have at least 2 emergency numbers at their disposal at all times and be familiar with the 911 system for emergencies. They should know their home address, the location of fire extinguishers and first aid supplies, and emergency escape routes in the event of a fire or other emergency.

Factors to consider when considering leaving the student at home include the following:

- The policy and standards of the student's placement agency. When in doubt, ask! The agency can then refer the question to the student's biological parents to get their preference in any particular situation.
- The length of time the host parents will be gone and the distance they will be from the home
- The age and maturity level of the student

- The age and maturity level of other children remaining at home (if any)
- The availability of another family who would temporarily house and care for the student during the host parent absence
- The student's longevity record in the home and the level of trust the host parents have in the student

In all cases, it is best to notify the student's placement agency of any extended absence of the host parents from the home if the student will not be traveling with them.

5. Student Problems

As with raising ones biological children, all host families encounter problems and challenges. Problems can often be compounded due to language barriers, religious and cultural differences, and mis-matched expectations.

If the Host Family becomes aware of a personal problem or difficulty that the student is experiencing (whether school-related or personal), this should be brought to the attention of the school's international student advisor or the student's placement agency. Such matters are kept confidential unless the contrary is necessary to provide a solution.

Some problems can be resolved by patient and persistent communication with the student, often mediated by an official from the Christian schools or involving the student's parent. One temptation is for members of the host family to be personally offended or hurt if the student is dissatisfied for whatever reason with the host family situation. Because temperaments, personalities, and family up-bringing vary widely among international students, host families who have lost, or are about to lose a student due to "dissatisfaction" should remind themselves that there are millions upon millions of children in the world today who would love to take the place of the dissatisfied student. The only difference is that these other students are either not aware of the opportunity you could provide them or they cannot afford it.

If you have done your best, then follow the advice of Solomon in Ecclesiastes:

Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives [it to you—Author added]. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift! God deals out joy in the present, the *now*.

Ecclesiastes 5:19-20 (The Message)

Conclusion

We hope this Host Family Handbook has provided you with the information you need to make your participation for hosting an international student a successful and rewarding experience for you and your family. Remember to have fun as you get to know your student. By opening up your home, you are creating bridges between cultures and sharing the Love of God in a very real and practical way. Thank you for your commitment! Please email us with questions, comments, or suggestions!