



**YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING**  
**Intercultural Exchange Programs**

# *The United States of America welcomes you!*

**CONGRATULATIONS!** We are glad you have decided to participate in the Youth For Understanding exchange program, and we are thrilled that you are now preparing to come to the United States of America! In this letter, we will tell you about YFU USA so you can prepare to live and study in our country. We look forward to your arrival!

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# YFU USA

## DEAR STUDENT,

As a YFU exchange student you are now part of a unique community that recognizes the ever-changing, interdependent world. During your exchange, you will learn skills and gain insights needed to succeed in a multicultural, interconnected global society. You will learn about US culture, the American English language, and much more!

YFU USA has a national office Washington, DC, an office in Michigan, and Field Directors located across the country. When you arrive in the United States, you will meet your Area Representative (Area Rep) in the first few weeks. Your Area Rep is your most important YFU resource, and he or she is your primary contact with YFU USA. As a volunteer passionate about intercultural exchange, your Area Rep will help you and your host family with any questions or challenges you might have. Your Area Rep will be in touch with you monthly throughout your stay, but we encourage you to contact him or her frequently, as well. In addition to your Area Rep, YFU staff members and volunteers will also assist you while you are in the US. They will organize several orientations and social activities for all YFU exchange students and host families in your community.

The YFU staff members in your area and at both offices are available to advise and assist you. While in the USA, you can call for assistance from any telephone during business hours by dialing **1.866.4.YFU.USA** (1.866.493.8872). For after-hours emergencies, call **1.800.424.3691**. These are free phone calls.

## LIVING WITH A US FAMILY

YFU is rooted in cultural exchange through the experience of living with a US family. The families across the United States are diverse; your host family can be of any size, race or ethnic group. YFU families are caring people, and they look forward to sharing their lives with you. They have opened their home to you for the year because they are passionate about cross-cultural learning. They do expect honesty and openness, and they are ready to teach you about their own family culture. They have been carefully selected, screened and approved by YFU.

YFU USA matches you with a host family who will provide you with a home that includes a bed, a place to study, meals and a supportive environment for you to learn and grow. This family may share some of your interests, and can help you adjust to US culture. Part of your

responsibility will be adjusting to this new family. It may include different foods, rules, and family activities, including helping with chores around the house. You are expected to be open to your new family and follow their rules.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND KEEPING IN TOUCH

As you prepare to move from your home country it is helpful to think about how you will keep in contact with friends and family back home. While you may be excited to connect with friends in your home country daily via email, instant messaging and internet phone services, YFU has found that excessive contact with one's home country can hinder your ability to assimilate to the new culture.

A key factor in having a successful exchange experience is challenging yourself to build new relationships. This experience can be difficult, however, it promotes personal growth and builds resiliency. YFU encourages you to think critically about your use of social media and how often you contact your home country while in the US. Dependence on your home network of friends and family may prevent you from forming a relationship with your host family. It may also prevent you from seeking out new friends and joining extracurricular activities. Ultimately, you will be missing out on new, exciting experiences if you're spending too much time communicating with your home country.

If you have a habit of texting or calling someone daily or several times per day, YFU suggests you think about this habit now and try to decrease your dependency on connecting with this person.

While you are still in your home country, talk to your parents and friends about why limited contact is important while you are in the US. Perhaps you can develop a



schedule so friends and family will know how often you will check your messages and when you will communicate with them. YFU recommends no more than one contact home per week in order to assimilate and build meaningful relationships in your US home, school, and community. Encourage your parents to seek support from the YFU national office in your home country if they need to share any concerns about your exchange and frequency of communication.



Texting and using forms of social media can be useful in making friends and keeping in touch with your US family. Before departing your home country, add your host family members to your contact list within your social media networks (Facebook, Instagram etc.). Reach out to your host family and begin to build your relationship by trading photos and learning more about what they like. Look for your school on Facebook, and introduce yourself or “like” the school’s page. After you arrive, talk with your host family about how they communicate, especially for logistical purposes. Texting your US friends and family can be a great way to communicate, and can help you improve your language skills by reading and writing in a non-academic setting. Please refer to the Social Networking Safety Tips that follows this letter for additional advice.

Many schools in the US will require a computer for your schoolwork, so it is useful to bring a laptop if you have one. YFU encourages you to think critically about how often you are using your electronic devices for purposes other than schoolwork. In order to build relationships and assimilate to US culture, face-to-face interactions with family, friends, classmates, and community members are key. Excessive time spent alone on the computer will prevent you from experiencing the US. If this becomes a problem, YFU may request you limit your use of computer and mobile devices.

## SPENDING MONEY AND MONEY MANAGEMENT

Most students find they spend approximately \$250 per month (US) for personal expenses such as telephone bills, clothes, and entertainment. You may need some extra money for winter clothes, or any required immunizations. There may also be some school-related expenses for field trips, clubs, or participation on athletic teams. As you prepare to leave, you may want to create a budget in order to think about other costs, such as YFU trips, school dances, or vacations should your host family travel.

We recommend you arrange with your parents before your departure how they will send you money. Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) are widely available in the US. Opening a joint account with your natural parents in your home country, which has an automatic withdrawal card accepted by US banks, has been a successful strategy for many students.

**Typical costs of common items are listed in the online student handbook, [Passport to the USA](#).** Do not bring large amounts of cash with you, as it cannot be replaced if lost. Never give out your Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) card and personal identification number (PIN) to anyone. If you choose to participate in a YFU trip, please pay the trip vendor directly. Do not give money to your host family, Area Rep, or anyone else to pay on your behalf. Our travel partners are very helpful and experienced. They will be happy to advise you regarding payment or travel options to participate in a trip



## TRANSPORTATION

Understanding how to get around your new community in the US is often a shock for YFU students because you are not allowed to drive and public transportation isn’t always available. You will likely have to depend on other people for transportation. Most students tell us they soon find friends and family members who will drive them where they need to go. One question you will often ask others is: “May I get a ride with you?” (However, you should never ride with strangers!)

## SMOKING

Research on the dangers and health risks of smoking has greatly influenced American attitudes towards cigarettes. Many Americans have very strong anti-smoking attitudes, and if you are younger than 18 years old, it is illegal to buy cigarettes or tobacco products in the US. It is also illegal for anyone else to buy these items for you. Your host family may have strong feelings about smoking, too. If you told YFU in your application you do not smoke, but you have recently started, it is important you stop smoking or tell the YFU national office in your home country about this change. They will notify YFU USA. This information is important for placing you with an appropriate US host family.

## YOUR HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Your experience in a US high school will have a significant impact on your exchange experience. US high schools often begin around 8 AM and classes are over in the early afternoon. In some locations, the day starts and ends later, depending on the school. In all cases, you can expect to spend 6-8 hours a day at school, and partaking in school sponsored activities.

Your high school has agreed to welcome you to their community as an ambassador of your country. As an ambassador, be prepared to teach others about your country and culture. Bring photos, maps, and other items that represent your country so you can teach your peers about where you come from. Be ready for people to ask you basic questions about your country, and don't be surprised if they need help locating your country on a world map. In some cases, we may have trouble understanding your accent. Don't be discouraged; speak slowly and clearly.

Your school has expectations and requirements aimed at helping you integrate within your new community and within the school. There are specific expectations you will need to meet in regards to your academic work (a minimum of a "C" average grade in each class) and attendance policies. In addition, school personnel expect you will pay attention in classes, complete homework, actively participate in your learning, and be a positive member of the school community by exhibiting mature, responsible behavior. Some exchange students may have already completed school in their home country, however, these students are still held to the same standards described above.

Your school will also expect you to communicate in English. Use this time in a US school to immerse yourself in English. It may seem hard at first, but you will improve as time goes by. Additional English tutoring is often available if you are struggling. If your level of language comprehension is hindering your ability to participate in class, schools may



***“YFU helps each student make the best of their exchange.”***

require additional tutoring. YFU will work with the school to arrange this support, if needed. Be sure to let your Area Rep and teachers know if you are having problems understanding your schoolwork so they can provide assistance.

Shortly after you arrive, you will go to the school to meet your Principal or guidance counselor. You must bring a transcript of the classes you were taking in your home country, along with the grades you received. Bring a copy of your birth certificate for school enrollment, as well as your immunization records.

You may be asked to select the classes you will take, or your schedule may already be created for you. Be prepared to talk (in English) with school personnel about the subjects you have studied and your interests. Some schools offer elective classes such as journalism, computer coding, poetry, cooking, and many others that allow you to explore your interests and develop new passions. It is the decision of the school, not YFU, in setting your school schedule and class placement. At the end of your exchange, most schools will issue a certificate of attendance but they will not issue a high school diploma or allow exchange students

to graduate. Students pushing to graduate puts the YFU-school relationship at risk.

US high schools often offer a variety of extracurricular activities such as environmental club, debate team, academic clubs, theater groups, choirs, sports, band and many others. Don't be shy about asking to join these groups; these activities are a great way to pursue your interests, make friends, and learn about US culture.



Just as there is great diversity among US families, there is great variety among US high schools. Many schools have specific rules and procedures to join sports teams, take enrollment tests in English or math, or getting immunizations. Keep in mind that not all schools offer the same academic subjects, so you will need to be flexible in what classes you take. You may also need to have a physical exam to participate in school sports, which is not fully covered by your insurance.

## IMMUNIZATIONS

If your immunization record was incomplete or if your national office indicates you will need additional immunizations, **arrange to get them before leaving for the US**. Schools will not enroll you if you do not have all the required immunizations. Your YFU insurance does not cover the cost of immunizations; so bring additional money for any immunizations you are unable to get at home. Some immunizations can cost up to \$75 each).

## YOUR PREPARATION MATERIALS

Please keep this for reference when you travel to the US. In addition, remember to review, print and/or save the link to the student handbook, **Passport to the USA**. This online resource contains useful information on preparing for and having a successful exchange experience. It contains necessary information about preparation, packing, travel, getting settled, policies, rules and procedures, as well as

**“YFU is trustworthy and gives you so much more than the exchange year itself.”**

what to do if you need help. In addition, do research on your community and begin to learn about your new home. Another great resource to learn more about US culture, history, and current events is the website [america.gov](http://america.gov).

## SOON YOUR ADVENTURE WILL BEGIN!

The YFU national office in your home country will provide you with the details of your flight. Safe travel of students is very important to us. We have extensive working relationships and contact with airlines, embassies, consulates, and the US Department of State, so we are kept informed of situations that may impact travel. As a traveler, you must follow all safety and security procedures of the airline and of your YFU national office.



## YOUR ARRIVAL

When you arrive in the US, you will go through US Customs and Immigration. Be sure to hang on to your passport and your visa paper (Certificate of Eligibility DS-2019 or I-20). All are important documents and you should keep them safe. On the plane, you will receive a US Customs Declaration form. Study this form so you understand how to complete it. Be sure you do NOT bring any fresh meat, plant products or other living things into the US. It is likely these will be confiscated by the US Customs Office. Read your **Passport to the USA** handbook for more details on the forms and documents you will need for travel.

After passing through customs and immigration, you will be met by your host family or a YFU representative if the arrival airport is your final destination. If you are traveling elsewhere in the US, you should proceed to your connecting flight. Should you need assistance please call **1.800.705.9510** to speak to the YFU Travel Department. This number is answered 24 hours a day and is a free call from any phone. If you cannot find a phone, go to the nearest airline ticket counter and ask them to help you locate a phone.

## TRAVEL POLICY

The YFU program is focused on you experiencing what it is like to live in the US on a daily basis. This is not a travel program. You should not expect to travel widely in the US.

YFU will typically grant permission for students to travel within the US with their host family, or with their high school on an organized trip. Each region will also offer an opportunity for you to travel with other YFU students; you will receive further details shortly after your arrival.

While in the US, some students may have the opportunity to travel with their host families or schools to Mexico, Canada or the Caribbean. Written permission from your natural parents and permission from YFU USA is required before you will be allowed to travel outside the US. Please note: Students traveling to Mexico are required to have a notarized statement from natural parents.

YFU USA must approve all travel before tickets are purchased. Be sure you are familiar with this policy by reviewing the **Passport to the USA** Handbook and securing permission before making non-refundable purchases or deposits on any kind of tickets.

## VISITORS FROM HOME

Your host family has agreed to host you, but not your family and friends from your home country. Visitors from your home country must be approved in advance by YFU USA and typically will only be approved if scheduled toward the end of your exchange. You must communicate these plans with your host family and the YFU regional office before itineraries are arranged.

## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING RECENTLY?

For many of you, it has been several months since you completed your YFU application and you may have started new and different activities in the last few months. If any changes have occurred in your life since you completed your application, we encourage you to write us a brief email, in

English, describing these changes. Did you join any new clubs? Did you start a new hobby? Did you begin playing a new sport? We would enjoy hearing from you, and your future host family would like to know what you have been doing recently. Send your updates to [inbound@yfu.org](mailto:inbound@yfu.org).

## ARE YOU READY?

Your journey to the USA will give you the opportunity to meet new people, try new things, see a new place, and learn more about yourself. Make sure you understand all YFU USA policies and are prepared to follow them when you arrive. Take time to practice English so you become comfortable using the language all the time.

We wish you all the best in your YFU exchange!

Sincerely,



Scott J. Messing  
President & CEO  
YFU USA



## YFU REQUIRED IMMUNIZATIONS

IMMUNIZATION	DOSES	SCHEDULE
Diphtheria, Tetanus (DPT, Td, Tdap)	4	Last dose must be within 10 years of the program end date
Polio	3	Last dose must be after age 4
MMR (measles, mumps, rubella)	2	
Varicella (chicken pox)	2	The date of disease (month/year) will also be accepted
Meningitis	1	Some schools require 1 additional after age 16 (this is done on a case by case basis)
Hepatitis B	3	2nd dose must be at least 1 month after 1st dose; 3rd dose must be at least 4-6 months after the first dose with an 8 weeks interval between dose 2 and 3
TB Test		Needs to be done within 1 year of program start date

*This is a general guide for immunizations. Depending on the community you are placed in you may need additional immunizations. Your YFU office will inform you of any special requirements as we identify them.*

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# SOCIAL NETWORKING SAFETY TIPS

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Having a Facebook or other social networking profile (Instagram, Twitter, etc.) is a good way to make plans with American friends and to keep in touch after going back to your home country. By following a few simple safety tips, you can avoid creating problems for yourself and others.

- **FACEBOOK IS PUBLIC.** The way you present yourself and your friends on Facebook and other social media sites can be seen by hundreds of people you know and care about. Every time you post something, decide whether you are representing yourself, your home country, family, YFU and host family well.
- **“FRIEND” YOUR HOST FAMILY MEMBERS.** It’s a great way to help everyone communicate better. Many YFU communities and fields have private group pages on Facebook. Be sure to join your group to share your experience with others and keep informed about what is happening in your area.
- **LIMIT DIGITAL ACTIVITY WITH YOUR HOME COUNTRY.** While you are on exchange, Facebook and other social media playformsshould be used in English to communicate with your local American friends. Like any excessive communication with friends and family at home, it makes it harder to settle into the USA. If this becomes a problem for you, YFU and your host family will ask you to limit your time on Facebook.
- **POST PICTURES** from your American life. It’s fun for others to see what you are doing and you will have a nice photo album to look back on when your exchange year is over.
- **KEEP YOUR PROFILE PRIVATE** and viewable only to people you know! Do not share your phone number, address or email with everyone who has internet access. You can make these changes in your privacy settings.
- **DELETE INAPPROPRIATE COMMENTS FROM FRIENDS.** It’s OK to delete things you are embarrassed about or that you would not be proud of later in life. If a friend tags you, you can delete tags of yourself in any pictures that you don’t want others to see. Even if your profile is private, your photos can be accessed publicly if you have been “tagged”.
- **DON’T HARASS OR THREATEN OTHERS.** Passing along rumors, unkind jokes or false stories about someone on social networking sites is called cyber-bullying. Don’t complain about your host school, friends or host family members on Facebook or other online platforms. Be sure to tell a host parent, teacher or YFU representative if you become the target of cyber-bullying.
- **JOIN YFU GROUPS** and other groups associated with your interests. This will help you learn about American culture. Don’t join groups that might offend or embarrass yourself, your host family or your own parents.
- **UNIVERSITIES AND EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING AT WHAT YOU SHARE ONLINE.** All information and pictures you post of yourself and your friends can become part of a school or job application later in life.
- **YFU STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS WILL BE VIEWING WHAT YOU SHARE.** Any information share by you via social media or posted about you by others involve a violation of your host family’s trust or YFU rules may result in disciplinary action up to and including being sent home.
- **DON’T FRIEND ANYONE YOU DON’T KNOW PERSONALLY.** It’s not rude to ignore friend requests from strangers. It’s smart.

Have fun and stay safe!



## SHARE YOUR YFU EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

Whether it's **trying new foods, spending an afternoon with friends or exploring local sites**, your YFU experience will present you with unique opportunities. Social media offers a great platform for sharing these experiences and documenting your exchange.

Include one (or all) of the following hashtags when posting a photo or update to social media to connect with other YFU students and so we can follow along on your adventure too:



**#MakeTheWorldYourHome**

**#WeAreYFU**

**#YFUUSA**

**#YouthForUnderstanding**

**#myYFU**



*Don't forget to tag YFU USA in your posts. We might even re-share it with the broader YFU network!*



### Think before you share.

No matter what your privacy settings are, when you share something online, it is never truly 'private'. Before posting a photo or a status update consider how you are presenting yourself and whether you are representing yourself, your home country, family, YFU and host family well. Always be respectful.

### Connect with us:

[facebook.com/yfu.usa.fan](https://facebook.com/yfu.usa.fan)

[youtube.com/yfuusa](https://youtube.com/yfuusa)

[@yfu\\_usa](https://twitter.com/yfu_usa)

[pinterest.com/yfuusa](https://pinterest.com/yfuusa)

[@YFUUSA](https://instagram.com/YFUUSA)

[@yfu\\_travel](https://twitter.com/yfu_travel)

## IMPORTANT YFU USA POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Read the Full List of YFU USA Policies & Procedures in the Passport to the USA Handbook.

**Drinking and Alcohol** – It is against the law for anyone under the age of 21 to purchase, possess, or consume (drink) alcoholic beverages in the US. This means not only drinking, but buying, attempting to buy or carrying/holding alcoholic beverages is illegal. Since all YFU high school students are under the age of 21, violations of this law are also violations of a major YFU USA program policy. Please do not put yourself in situations where alcohol is being consumed by other teenagers, and NEVER ride in a vehicle with anyone who has been drinking (including adults).

**Smoking and Tobacco products** – Federal and state laws prohibit anyone under the age of 18 to purchase or use tobacco products. If you are caught doing so, you are taking the risk of being arrested, fined and/or sent to jail. You most likely will be suspended from school and will not be eligible to participate in extra-curricular school activities, which includes sports. You also take the risk of being asked to leave your host family. YFU USA encourages anyone who currently smokes to quit now and make every effort to abstain from smoking while on the YFU program.

**Drugs** – Only drugs prescribed by a licensed medical professional or sold over the counter in stores are legal. Laws regarding the use or possession of marijuana in the US are still very strict, along with the use or possession of other illegal drugs. Please do not put yourself in situations where drugs are being used.

**Pornography** – It is very likely the laws regarding pornography are much more conservative in the US than in your country. Please read the following very carefully: Possession or purchase of pornographic materials is illegal for anyone under the age of 18. This includes pornography downloaded from the Internet. Please do not download pornography on your host family, school or any other computer. The laws regarding child pornography in the US are even stricter and violating these laws can easily result in deportation or imprisonment.

**Computer use/Internet** – Use of someone else's computer (host family, school, library, friend) is a privilege. Please respect this privilege by following the rules for computer use established by whoever owns the device you are using. Do not download programs without permission and never download pornography or accept emails containing pornography. You should also not open emails with attachments as they may carry viruses. Talk to your host family when you arrive to discuss rules of computer use.

**Mobile phones** – If it is determined that mobile phone use is interfering with your cultural adjustment, YFU will support the host family enforcing restrictions on use. YFU may also issue a warning or probation letter to the student regarding this issue. Many US schools prohibit mobile phone use on school property and will permanently dismiss any student found to be in violation of this rule.

**School** – Almost all schools have a website with information about school policies, including dress code and required immunizations. When you have been notified of your school placement, please be sure to visit your school's website and learn about the rules and policies. Rules regarding what you can and cannot wear, style of hair, and accessories vary from school to school. It is your responsibility to understand and abide by the rules of your school. All YFU students are expected to follow school attendance policies, maintain at least a grade of "C" in each class and should not expect to graduate. It is the decision of the school, not YFU, regarding class placement in school. The Regional staff will support all school policies regarding exchange students.

**English Language** – Students with English Language deficiencies may be recommended for tutoring. In these cases, tutoring is not an option; it is a requirement. Students refusing tutoring help may be placed on probation and may be recommended for early return. If a student is recommended for tutoring it will be very important for them to make every effort to improve his or her abilities to speak, read and understand English as soon as possible.

**Contact with natural parents and friends from your home country** – In order for you to get the most benefit from your exchange and truly integrate into your host family and American culture, it is important for you to limit contact (phone, email, text messaging) with your parents and friends from your home country to no more than once per week. Homesickness is cured by becoming involved where you live, not by calling home. Problems that may arise while you are on program should be worked out with your host family, your Area Representative and YFU USA staff who are here to help you.

**Independent travel/Visits to or from natural parents or friends** – YFU USA discourages visits from natural family members or friends from home as visits may have a negative impact on the overall exchange experience. If you wish to have a visit from your natural family or friends, it is best to wait until after your school year ends. All visits from natural parents/natural family members must be approved by YFU in your home country must approve of visits BEFORE finalizing your plans. Students are not allowed to miss school for independent travel with family and friends from home.