Youth For Understanding USA

www.yfu-usa.org

Questions & Answers

YFU Answers your Questions About Hosting An Exchange Student

Usually when a family considers opening its home and heart to an international exchange student lots of questions come up. Here are some that are asked most often:

How will our family benefit by hosting an international student through Youth For Understanding USA (YFU USA)?

There are many reasons why hosting is a wonderful experience for the whole family. You'll learn about another culture and language—without leaving home. You'll start a life-long relationship with your new "son" or "daughter," and when your student returns home you'll have a special friend in another country. Members of your family will feel closer to each other through sharing your daily lives with a YFU student. If you have children, they'll gain a broader perspective on the world, learning more about geography, communication and international cultures. If your children are young, they'll probably love having a big brother or sister from another country. Most of all, you'll all have a lot of fun!

What do other families think about the YFU experience?

Most families who have hosted an exchange student think very highly of the positive impact the experience had on their lives and their own children's lives. Perhaps the opinion of YFU host families at the end of their hosting year can better describe it for you:

- 93 percent enjoyed learning about another culture and sharing their culture with their international student.
- 90 percent say they increased their understanding of the differences and similarities between their exchange student's culture and their own culture.
- 86 percent recommend hosting an exchange student to their friends and relatives. Many go on to host another student and many others become YFU volunteers. Whether you host one student or welcome many more into your home, hosting a YFU student is a great educational experience for the entire family.

Why should we host through YFU USA?

As a member of the YFU international network, YFU USA is able to draw on more than 50 years of experience in the exchange field. We're dedicated to preparing young people for their responsibilities and opportunities in a changing, interdependent world. We accomplish this mission through exchange programs for high school students. Since our program began in 1951, our hallmark has been the extraordinary support we've provided to 200,000 students and their host families.

One of more than 1,000 professionally-trained volunteers works with each student and family, providing support and guidance every step of the way. Professional counselors and language tutors also are available when needed. As one host mother put it, "YFU was there for us whenever we needed them, 24 hours a day."

How many international students come to the US each year? What countries are they from? How old are they?

More than 2,000 YFU students come to the US each year from about 50 countries in Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Pacific. Also, more than 1,000 American students live abroad with host families each year through YFU. All YFU students are 15 to 18 years old.

How long do YFU international students live in the US? Would our student live with us that whole time?

Most YFU international students live in the US for one academic year—about 11 months—from approximately mid-August through late June. Some six-month hosting opportunities are available for semester students arriving in either January or August, and occasionally even shorter stays. With the exception of possible YFU-arranged field trips, your international student will be part of your family during his or her entire exchange experience.

What are the requirements for being a host family?

Host families are as different and diverse as Americans themselves. They come from all ethnic, racial, economic, and religious backgrounds. They live in cities, small towns, and rural communities.

You don't need to have teenagers to host. In fact, any two people related by blood or marriage can be a YFU host family—whether you have young children, adult children, or no children at all. If yours is a non-traditional household interested in sharing your home with a young person from overseas, YFU USA will consider your application to host following special selection procedures.

All you need to do is open your home and hearts to your student and provide room, board, love, guidance, and the experience of what everyday life is like in America. It's enriching—and fun!

Will our YFU student speak English?

All YFU international students who come to the US have studied spoken and written English. Most of them have studied our

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language for five years or more, and international students from a number of countries must pass an English proficiency test before being accepted onto the program. Undoubtedly, you will find that your student's English ability will improve remarkably during your months together—something host families often find both exciting and gratifying. YFU USA provides paid tutoring for students who need additional assistance.

Will our YFU student attend school?

Yes. Your student will attend your local high school, will take courses typical of an American his or her age, and will participate in extracurricular activities.

What other kinds of activities will our student participate in while in the US?

The intention behind hosting is to have your YFU student be part of any activities your family is involved in—from household chores to family outings. YFU students come to the US expecting a family living experience, not a travel program. However, many families enjoy showing their student what makes our country special—everything from historical places to natural wonders, from sporting events to the arts. As one host father said, "We see things through new eyes when we're showing off our country to our YFU student. We've developed a new appreciation for things we took for granted before."

No doubt your YFU student also will make friends in school and in the community, and will be involved in activities through these networks. Sometimes YFU also arranges optional field trips to other parts of the country for international students.

How much does it cost to host a YFU student?

There is no charge. The only expenses for your family will be the costs of including another person in your regular activities, including three meals a day. You will be eligible for a $50 per month federal tax deduction for hosting a YFU international student.

Will our family be paid for hosting a YFU student?

No. A YFU host family is not paid, as our goal is to encourage family members to accept their international student just like a brother or sister, son or daughter. This way, hosting becomes an enriching volunteer experience for the whole family.

Are we responsible for our student's medical bills or spending money?

No. YFU international students have their own medical insurance and bring their own spending money.

Does YFU require that we have a separate bedroom for our international student?

No, you don't need to have a separate room for your YFU student. He or she may share a bedroom with a same-sex child. All you need to provide is a bed and a quiet study area.

How are YFU students and host families matched up?

The first step is for your family to complete an application and be interviewed by a YFU volunteer. Then, your YFU volunteer will help you choose your international student, taking into consideration a number of factors to help make the best possible match. Variables include your family's values, the kind of activities you're involved in (sports, arts, intellectual pursuits, etc.), your religious preferences, whether you'd prefer a student who is quiet or outgoing, what area of the world you'd prefer your student to be from, and so forth. Hosting does require a period of adjustment for all family members and for your student in the beginning. Common interests and values make that adjustment easier.

How will YFU USA prepare us to be a host family?

You'll receive a copy of the YFU Host Family Handbook, which will be your reference guide throughout the exchange year. Also, before your student arrives, you'll be invited to an orientation program for host families. Here you'll get the answers to any last-minute questions, meet other host families (including some who have hosted before and can share their experiences with you), and learn how to support your new family member through normal adjustments such as culture shock and speaking a new language. You'll also be invited to a second orientation, shortly after your student arrives.

Finally, keep in mind that your most important resource, your volunteer YFU area representative, will be there to answer questions and help you out in every way, all year long.

What will happen if we have problems while hosting?

Members of the YFU USA support network, including professional counselors, will do their best to help you resolve any difficult situations that arise during the year. Often, the only thing that's needed is a chance to talk things over with a third party. YFU volunteers are trained to provide an opportunity for students and family members to feel safe to discuss what's troubling them. Occasionally, YFU USA will find another home for the student, although this usually isn't necessary. As you know if you're a parent, getting to the other side of a rough time with a child can be a very rewarding experience. It's that way with hosting, too.

Who do I contact for more information about hosting a YFU student?

If you're interested in hosting a YFU student or if you have other questions, please call YFU at **1-866-4-YFUUSA** or sign up online at **www.yfu-usa.org.** Hosting will be a wonderful educational experience for your entire family.

If you or anyone you know is interested in a YFU exchange experience or hosting an international student, please call YFU USA at 1-866-4-YFUUSA or visit us at www.yfu-usa.org