



YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING
Intercultural Exchange Programs

SEPTEMBER SUPPORT TIPS

Happy Fall! For those of you who have just started your journey as area reps, welcome to the Support Tips e-Series. As international students arrive and settle into their American families and lives, YFU would like to help you make this time of transition valuable for everyone you support.

We hope these timely tips will provide you with the materials necessary to have comfortable and meaningful conversations during your monthly meetings. As always, thank you for the work you do, YFU could not exist without volunteers!

SUPPORT TIPS

UPDATES TO THE MONTHLY CONTACT

If you haven't already, please take a moment to read about the new policy and reporting features – **Updates to the Monthly Contact Reports**. Reporting in a consistent manner is critical so that the YFU support system can work. It is YFU's hope that by including email as an approved method of contact for Monthly Contact Reports, we will observe an increase in contacts made as well as contacts reported.

POST-ARRIVAL ORIENTATION

Students and host families are required to attend a **Post-Arrival Orientation**. If a student's family cannot go, please help the student network with others to find a ride through a carpool. If for any reasons the student cannot attend the in-person orientation, please make arrangements to give the student a one-on-one orientation.

ADJUSTMENT PERIOD AND CULTURE SHOCK

For some students, the newness wears off quickly and being overwhelmed comes fast. Many students go through culture shock in the first 30-days. To support students and host families successfully, please review the signs of culture shock and how to work through it, on pg 50-53 in the **Area Rep handbook**.

ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

During the first few months host families and students are learning to live together and may not be comfortable speaking openly in front of one another about their challenges. Meeting with students and host parents separately is strongly recommended.

- It is important that everyone feels they have been heard

fully. Speaking to them directly and privately can help.

- Prior to coming to the home, inform the family you need an opportunity to chat with the student privately and ask them not to be surprised if you go for a short walk. Suggest running out for coffee or ice cream, etc.
- It is important to request to speak with one or both host parents without the natural children, to allow the parents to disclose more sensitive information that may include sibling rivalry, etc.

BE THEIR ADVOCATE!

You are your students' and host families' unbiased advocate during the exchange year. This may be the first time these students have been away from home. Remain objective when speaking with all parties, if an issue arises.

- Never threaten to send students home! YFU is committed to working through challenges, since exchange is difficult!
- Remember, our students are teenagers and may not have all the skills and tools they need to adjust to a new situation on their own.
- Listen to both parties' concerns, and help them develop problem solving skills. They will learn many of these, in their Post Arrival Orientations. Help them review and implement these newly-acquired skills.

BE A WATCHFUL COMMUNITY

If a concern arises during your regular monthly contact, please call or email your Support Services Manager (SSM) right away. Any suspicion or report of abuse or neglect must be reported immediately to YFU. If a serious event occurs outside of work hours, you can reach the on-call SSM by dialing 1.800.424.3691.

SCHOOL CONTACT

Contact schools every three months. School contact can be made by email. We recommend that you have the host family list you as an emergency contact on the school information. This may help validate your relationship with the student and the family.

REPLACEMENT SITUATION

YFU strongly discourages replacements in the first 30-days, unless for student safety. This is a normal adjustment period for students, which they need to work through before we consider moving them. It is likely they will go through some culture shock and we want to encourage them to keep trying.

As a reminder families agree to give a minimum of two weeks' notice for moves. If replacement becomes necessary, students should be reassured that it is YFU's responsibility to find new families, though any suggestions they have are helpful and welcome.

WELCOME/ARRIVAL PLACEMENT TIPS

Repping a student and host family in a welcome or arrival placement situation presents a unique set of considerations. To get in-depth tips on how to help students and host families through this time please review the [Arrival Placement Support Tips page](#).

ADMINISTRATIVE

THE FIRST STUDENT VISIT

It is required and very important that every YFU student meet their Area Representative in person within the first two weeks of arrival. Give students and host families your **YFU Business card** so they know who you are and how to contact you.

CHECK YOUR JUNK MAIL

YFU USA will communicate messages relating to regulations for the YFU community from this email address: **YFUQualityAssurance@yfu.org**. Make sure to check your junk mail in case the message is delivered there. Mark the message as "not junk" and move it to your inbox to prompt future delivery directly to your inbox.

SEE VISIT

The U.S. Department of State requires a home visit within 60 days of arrival of the student to the home (30 days for students in arrival or temporary host status). This Student Environment Evaluation, or SEE visit, can be completed as part of your first monthly contact if you did not perform the host family interview. SEE visits are very quick and can be completed in 10 minutes. The **SEE Visit Manual** provides more information and instructions.

GOING AWAY?

Please call or email your YFU Area Coordinator or Field Director if you will be out of town for two or more weeks. Let your student, host family and your FD know if you foresee a period of time when you will not be able to meet your commitment to return calls and emails promptly.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

FOR STUDENTS

How do you like school so far? What classes are you taking? How much time do you spend on homework?

Often, students compare things in the U.S. to their home country and teenagers tend to chat with each other and make comparisons. This is natural. Remind students that the differences aren't good or bad - they are just different. Over time, students will begin to separate judgment from observations. Remind them to be careful of sounding critical of the US in school and in their host home.

How often are you in touch with family and friends back home? Do you use your own computer? Your Host Family's computer?

Students need to be present in the US, and making connections with their US family and friends. Remind students again that too much contact with home keeps them “virtually at home” and not fully engaged in the exchange experience. Once a week contact is recommended. Sometimes it is the parent back home putting the pressure on their child, so try to find out who is the one struggling to let go. Suggest students keep a log of their texting, facebooking, skypeing and email to their home country. They may be surprised at how much time they really spend! Remind them that the only way to learn to live in a new culture and family is by interacting with new people and trying different things.

How do you feel about your English skills? How well do you understand what your host family/ teachers/ friends say? Can you read your textbooks?

If the student seems to be really struggling after the first few weeks, give your student a **language assessment**. If it reveals that your student needs additional language learning support, contact your Support Services Manager. There are other free apps for students such as Duolingo or translation apps. Also, YFU offers three **language help guidelines**: Oxford Picture Dictionary, Rosetta Stone and tutoring.

What has made you feel welcome in your host family? What do you know about each family member? What kinds of things have you done/talked about together?

Remind students that this is an EXCHANGE program. The choice of remaining a visitor or belonging to the family is up to them. They shouldn't spend too much time alone and should be open to invitations from their host family members and schoolmates. Asking questions and learning the routines, as well as actively participating in family life will help them become more of a family member. Be alert for any hesitancy, reports of unwelcome behavior by family members, or a student being isolated. Any report of suspicious activity should be reported to YFU right away.

FOR FAMILIES

How is your family adjusting to having a new family member in the house?

Remind the family to treat the exchange student as a family member, not a guest. Host siblings may resent their new family member, if the student isn't expected to do their same chores or if host siblings feel they have to share too much of their privacy or friends. Know your host families, as answers will vary greatly depending on if this is their first, 10th, 20th or even 30th time hosting.

How is your student adjusting to your family? What have you noticed - positive or negative - about their adjustment? Is he/she interacting with the family, willing to explore the local area, completing homework, etc.?

Speaking and interacting in English all day is exhausting for a non-native speaker. It is normal for exchange students to need breaks, and so short periods of time alone in their rooms to rest and recuperate is ok (and maybe needed at the beginning). But it is not a good sign if a student is spending hours every week talking with friends and family back home. This may be the student's first response because he/she is looking for familiarity, however the best way to adjust is for host families to continue to encourage their students to join family activities!

Have you had any challenges in adjusting to your exchange son/daughter (language, diet preferences, school enrollment, personal hygiene, connections with home country, etc.)? Is there something I can do to help?

Getting used to a new person in the house with different cultural norms and routines can take some time. Sometimes challenges arise because families become offended by what exchange students say or do not say. What they don't realize is that it is usually due to limited vocabulary. Encourage families to gently explain to students how what they say is taken. Reassure families that once a student becomes more comfortable in their home they will become better at expressing themselves.

This is also an opportunity to check in with the host family and ask if they've had a chance to explain house rules such as bathroom times, bed times, snacking, transportation, etc. and that explaining these rules is important. Some things that may

be obvious to a host family member, i.e. when it's appropriate to go to sleep or hanging out with friends, may vary greatly from the student's natural family's rules. Remind host families that appliances and plumbing vary greatly from country to country, and that they may need to explain which soap goes in the dishwasher or not to flush tampons, etc. down the toilet. Make sure to be clear!

How is your student's English - speaking as well as listening? Are you concerned by your student's English speaking skills at home or at school? Tell me about some of the conversations you've had with your student.

If it sounds like a student needs additional language learning support, contact your Support Services Manager. YFU encourages students to readout loud to a younger sibling or host parents from time to time, to grow their vocabulary. For student who needs more assistance, YFU offers three **language help guidelines**: Oxford Picture Dictionary, Rosetta Stone and tutoring.

If you have any questions about Monthly Contacts, **please contact your Support Service Manager!**