



YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING
Intercultural Exchange Programs

DECEMBER SUPPORT TIPS

December is full of fun activities, both foreign and familiar, and with them come high emotions. The holidays can be a stressful time for all, perhaps more so for our international students. You are YFU's eyes and ears on the ground. YFU Area Reps across the country are often the only YFU representatives to have direct contact with the students and host families on program. This is a great honor and a great responsibility. We thank you for accepting this responsibility and helping YFU support thousands of healthy and successful exchanges each year. Happy holidays!

SUPPORT TIPS

BE THEIR ADVOCATE!

You now have likely formed bonds and relationships with both your host families and students. This is great! If an issue arises, it is your job to support both parties impartially. Keep in mind too that YFU students have left their natural support systems at home. So as you support them,

- never threaten to send students home!
- remember, our students are teenagers and may not have all the skills and tools they need to adjust to a new situation.
- listen to their concerns, and help them develop problem solving skills.

Let your SSM know if you feel you may be developing a bias!

SECOND IN-PERSON CONTACTS

Many Area Reps find the holiday season as the best time to meet their host family and student in-person for a second time. Your second in-person contact with your student and host family must take place no later than the February contact. YFU suggests planning this in-person visit early. To review this policy, please refer to your **Area Rep Training Manual**.

HOLIDAY BLUES

Holidays are a prime time for homesickness. Often as exchange students get swept up in their host family's travels, traditions, extended family gatherings, etc., they miss traditions from home. Help your YFU students prepare for the holidays by encouraging them to share the holiday traditions of their natural family and country. And encourage your host

families, if possible, to incorporate some of the students' traditions into the celebrations this year. Sharing traditions allows students to share their culture and at the same time show gratitude to their host family.

TALK TO THEM IN PRIVATE

Make sure to instruct your students to go someplace private in the house for your conversation. Just as you need to talk to the parents without a child listening in! You might want to call them during a free period at school, offer to meet after school, or invite them to your home for a coffee, tea or a snack. Always tell your student that if they have something else they are not comfortable saying right now, that they can email you.

*Even if you see your student and/or host family casually on a regular basis, you must establish a specific meeting to discuss how each party is adjusting to the exchange experience.

RETURN TICKET INFORMATION

You may begin to receive questions about end-of-year travel. Host Families should have received an email advising them that they could look up the possible group flight date(s) for their students by logging into their host Family Account in **yfuusa.org**. If their student comes from a country with more than one group return flight date, they can choose their preferred from the choices. Instructions were included in the email and the deadline to submit a request. After the deadline to submit a request, students will receive conformation in January about their end-of-year departure dates and instructions on how to request a date change or CDR (change of departure) for a fee.

*YES students were not included in this email since their travel is arranged by another organization and they have a re-entry orientation at the end of the year.

MID-YEAR ORIENTATIONS

Midyear orientations happen soon after the new year. Remind students and host families to look for their invitation in the upcoming weeks and make plans to attend. This is a good time for you to interact with your host families and students, face-to-face (a requirement during the 2nd semester) and in a fun environment, so even if you're not involved in the orientation, consider attending too.

GIFT IDEAS

Gift giving can make students and families nervous if expectations aren't clearly understood. Encourage your host family and student to have a conversation about how holidays are celebrated in their home. Gifts do not need to be expensive. Consider using the internet to find do-it-yourself craft sites to get some fun ideas for inexpensive gift ideas. Here are a few good websites to get you started:

- [Simple DIY Gifts](#)
- [Home-Made Gifts](#)
- [63 Gift Ideas for Under \\$10](#)
- [Family Fun Crafts](#)

NEW YEAR'S EVE EXPECTATIONS

Everyone's expectations of New Year's Eve are different. While some cultures and people celebrate grandly, others hardly mark the passing of a year. Many teenagers, whether on exchange or living in their own country, have high expectations for New Year's Eve celebrations. It is worth explaining to your students that not every town has fireworks and not every American family celebrates with a big party. Help them set appropriate expectations.

DECEMBER HOLIDAYS AROUND THE WORLD!

Since students might not celebrate the same holidays you may know, here is a selection of some holidays from around the world!

Dec. 1 – Restoration of Independence (Portugal)

Dec. 5 – The King's Birthday (Thailand)

Dec. 6 – Independence Day (Finland) & Saint Nicholas Day (European Countries)

Dec. 8 – Day of Immaculate Conception (Roman Catholics & some Christian faiths) & Constitution Day (Uzbekistan)

Dec. 10 – Constitution Day (Thailand)

Dec. 12 – Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Mexico)

Dec. 16 – Victory Day Bijoy Dibosh (Bangladesh) & Day of Reconciliation (South Africa)

Dec. 16 - Dec. 5 – Hanukkah (Jewish Holiday)

Dec. 23 – The Emperor's Birthday (Japan)

Dec. 24 & 25 – Christmas (Christian Holiday)

Dec. 26 – Boxing Day (Various countries)

Dec. 26 - Jan. 1st – The Kwanzaa Holiday

Dec. 30 – Rizal Day (The Philippines)

Dec. 31 – New Year's Eve (Most countries)

ADMINISTRATIVE

CONTACT REPORTS ARE IMPORTANT

Personal contact with our students and host families allow an environment of support. Contact reports are due by the last day of the month, there is no grace period. Thanks for submitting your reports in this timeframe. YFU Quality standards require that monthly contact is recorded in the MY.YFU Contact Reporting System (CRS).

YOUR TRAVELING PLANS

If you will be traveling for an extended period please let YFU, your students and host families know you will be away. Also, make sure your host families and students know who to contact while you are gone.

PERMISSION TO TRAVEL

The holiday season means many host families will be traveling this month. Remember, Permission to Travel forms must be turned in two (2) weeks prior to the departure date. Review the YFU USA Travel Policy with host families and provide them with a copy of the **Permission to Travel form**.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

How was Thanksgiving? Did you help with the cooking? How did your host family celebrate the holiday?

Asking about the Thanksgiving celebration is a good way to check on student/family relationships. Discuss any issues the student brings up, and coach students on handling difficult situations.

What holiday traditions does your host family celebrate in the month of December? Are you exchanging gifts and if so what ideas do you have for your family?

By asking your students what holidays their host family will be celebrating, you have the chance to check in – indirectly – on their knowledge and comfort with the holiday season away from home. In terms of gifts, be sure to stress that money should not be the focus with choosing gifts. Encourage and brainstorm ways to make or purchase inexpensive gifts. They could make a scrapbook or picture story about their exchange thus far.

During this time of the year, is your natural family celebrating any holidays? If so, what do you usually do for the holidays this time of year? Have you shared this with your host family?

For most students, this is the first time they have been away from their families for the holidays so it is important to acknowledge the customs they will be missing. A good way to help with homesickness is to remember their natural family traditions and share them with the host family. Remind students that they are always going to have their home traditions to go back to, but that this might be the only time that they can experience American holidays firsthand by living in an American household.

Have you received an invitation for the YFU Mid-Year Orientation?

Remind and encourage all students to attend their local YFU Mid-Year Orientation that will occur at the beginning of the new year. Remember to research when their Mid-Year orientation might be, and pass on the information to them. Let them know that the value of this orientation is not only connecting with other YFU students from around the world, but also to help them reflect on the ups and downs of the first half of the exchange experience and to set goals for the second half.

FOR FAMILIES

Have you discussed holiday plans with your exchange student? What are the expectations for exchanging gifts?

Encourage host families to have open discussions with their students about family traditions surrounding the holiday, including gift giving so that expectations are clear. This will help to avoid embarrassment or guilt when the holiday finally arrives.

Host families should think in terms of presentation when it comes to gifts; the exchange student should feel like part of the family and have full participation in the gift giving, even if his or her gifts don't match their host siblings' in monetary value. As a reminder the many of the kids will also be getting gifts from home. This may be physical packages, extra money in their account or permission to go on a district trip.

*Remind the host family that if they are traveling over the holidays with their exchange student to make sure and send in the YFU Permission to Travel Form at least two weeks prior to departure day. Additionally, if Christmas travel may involve a short cut through Canada or a surprise cruise time overseas, then getting the DS2019 signed needs to be factored in for holiday mail. All too often we have kids stopped at borders on Christmas Eve as the DS2019 is forgotten!

What holidays does your student celebrate at home? Can you incorporate them in this month's festivities at your home?

All holidays throughout the year are a perfect time to learn about your exchange student's customs and rituals. Students could contribute an additional blessing at mealtime or a decoration for the home. Encourage your host families to invite their students to share the ways that their natural family celebrates during this time of year. This could be an addition to the meal, a blessing at the table or a decoration for the home. Showing the students that we are interested in their home celebrations will help them through this time of year. Also keep in mind that perhaps their student may not celebrate any particular holiday

during this time of year, but if that is the case, open up the discussion and ask what sorts of holidays they celebrate at different times during the year.

How has your student been handling the holiday season? Are they excited? Or do they seem a little more down?

Remember that this is a time where students who may have been doing well with culture shock, might hit the holiday blues. Give the Host Family a heads up on this possibility, and encourage them to ask questions to the student about how they celebrate holidays back home. Host families should be informing students of family's plans that involve being away from home especially on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Years Eve and Days. These are often times when families from home want to celebrate for a few minutes by phone or Skype. Letting kids know when it will be convenient to get these calls will help keep their family plans on time!

What are your family's New Year's Eve plans? As the New Year is closely upon us, have you considered goals for the New Year in your role as a host parent?

Many families celebrate the New Year quietly, by watching festivities on their televisions, or with other family traditions. Additionally, family rules may change for New Year's Eve. While some families extend the standard curfew or sleepover rules, others don't want their children out on the road at all. Encourage students and families to talk about New Year's traditions, options and rules now so that expectations can be set beforehand and so that the night will be fun and not a surprise or disappointment.

Have there been any significant changes in your household that YFU should know about?

If family members have moved into or out of the home, if parents have changed employer or employment status, if telephone numbers or email addresses have been changed, YFU needs to know and follow-up accordingly.

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