



FLEX

2026-2027 STUDENT HANDBOOK





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The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is a program of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, with funding from the U.S. government, and implemented by American Councils for International Education.

Dear FLEX Scholars,

We share your excitement for the opportunity to spend a year in the U.S. as a participant of the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program. The year ahead will be a unique time for you and your family.

We know that your parents will want to help you prepare for the year in the U.S. As you read this handbook together, you will find a checklist of things to do. You will need your parents' help with some of the tasks. For example, you will need their help with travel documents (passport, permission to travel without parents, and visa) and arranging for school credit.

However, we hope you will be able to make some decisions and prepare some things yourself. Being able to make choices and act independently is expected of teenagers in the U.S. For example, write a personal letter to your host family, select a few small gifts to take to your host family and future friends, choose a few photos, books or other items to take from home, and pack your own suitcase.

Please discuss the Program policies with your parents. Also discuss the allowances you will receive, and the expenses for which they are intended.

Perhaps you have mixed feelings about your departure for the United States for a year. You are probably both excited and a little scared. Your parents, and perhaps grandparents, probably have the same feelings. It is normal for parents to worry about their children. Please be assured that the American family that is waiting for you in the U.S. is prepared to care for you in the same way they would care for their own children. After some time with them, you will feel at home.

Please be sure to take this Handbook to the U.S. Your parents have their **Natural Parent Information Guide** for their reference while you are gone.

Again, our best wishes to you and congratulations to you and your family as you embark on this international exchange experience.

Sincerely,

Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Staff

Purpose of the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program

The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is funded by the United States government to promote respect for different cultures, friendship between the United States of America, Europe, and Eurasia, and opportunities for personal development through international host family living.

The Future Leaders Exchange program aims to improve mutual understanding between our countries by allowing young citizens of Europe and Eurasia to have the opportunity to observe and experience our way of life for an academic year while attending a U.S. high school and living with a U.S. host family.

The United States Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) administers the Future Leaders Exchange program grants. The Program is carried out by approximately 15 U.S. not-for-profit organizations selected to participate through a competitive grant process.

GOALS OF THE FUTURE LEADERS EXCHANGE PROGRAM

FLEX participants will:

1. Gain an understanding of American society, people, beliefs and culture.
2. Interact with Americans and generate enduring ties.
3. Teach Americans about your home country and culture.
4. Explore and acquire an understanding of the key elements of U.S. civil society.
5. Share and apply experiences and knowledge in your home country as alumni.

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WHAT THE FLEX PROGRAM PROVIDES

The FLEX program covers most of the costs of participating in the exchange program. However, there are some costs and fees that you will incur. Below is a list of what is covered by the FLEX program, and what is not.

THE FLEX PROGRAM PROVIDES:

- U.S. visa, including travel to U.S. Consulate for your visa interview
- Program orientation activities, including pre-program preparation in your home country and re-entry preparation in the U.S.
- Round-trip domestic and international travel between your home town and your host town in the U.S. The program will not pay for any baggage costs during travel to the U.S.; a \$100 travel allowance will be provided at the end of the program. Most major international airlines allow one free piece of checked baggage.
- Placement with a screened volunteer U.S. host family
- Medical insurance, except for pre-existing conditions, treatment for chronic or recurring illness, and dental care
- Monthly allowance of \$200 to help you participate in social activities and buying school supplies, toiletries and other similar items
- Program activities arranged in local U.S. communities
- One-time incidentals allowance of \$300, to be spent in consultation with your U.S. host family and your Placement Organization
- Enrollment in a U.S. secondary school

THE FLEX PROGRAM DOES NOT PROVIDE:

- An international passport or any exit documents necessary to leave your home country
- Reimbursement for travel to notification meetings that American Councils may hold in your country
- Excess or overweight baggage costs
- Telephone calls and emails to your host family or natural family
- Coverage for pre-existing conditions, treatment for chronic or recurring illness, and dental care
- Medical examinations required when you apply for FLEX
- Travel with U.S. host family and/or U.S. friends

CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why you are called an “exchange student”
- What Placement Organizations are
- The different parts of the Future Leaders Exchange

It is quite an honor to become a finalist on the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program! We encourage you to prepare yourself well for this wonderful opportunity.

This **Student Handbook** will tell you more about the program. So read the handbook carefully. It will give you important information on how to prepare for your year in the U.S. It also will help you understand what living with an American family and going to school in the U.S. may be like. It is your guide to the policies and procedures that you must follow while in the U.S. All students on the FLEX Program receive this handbook, and together with the **Natural Parent Information Guide** your parents will receive, it should answer most of the questions you and your parents have before you start your orientation program.

If the English in the book is difficult to understand, ask someone to help you with words or ideas you do not know. You will find the definitions for some special words in the Glossary on page 79.

We will call the FLEX Program “**the Program**” in this handbook.

Approximately 15 private American organizations will select host families and support FLEX students while they are in the United States. One of these organizations will place you with an American host family, conduct special educational programs for you, and have a representative to help you during the year. Each organization has its own staff, procedures, and rules. In this handbook, we call these organizations “**Placement Organizations**.” You will learn the name of the Placement Organization which will support you when you receive information about your host family from the American Councils representative in your area. You also will learn more about your Placement Organization and its special rules from its literature, which American Councils will give to you either at your pre-departure

before your departure for the U.S. You must follow the rules of your Placement Organization as well as those of the Program.

You and all other students on the Program will be called “**exchange students.**” Don’t let that term confuse you. Foreign students studying in the U.S. are called exchange students even though their natural family or country may not be hosting American students. The term does not literally mean to change one student for another; it simply refers to students on a study program abroad. You will be called an exchange student, even if your natural family is not hosting a student. Therefore, in this handbook, when the term exchange student is used, you will know that it means you.

There are different parts of the FLEX Program, and several organizations administer the Program. The descriptions on the next page will help you understand what they are.

Recruitment. A representative of American Councils visited your region, conducted interviews, and provided information about the program. American Councils staff will continue to provide you information about the Program, including host family information, how to get your visa, and departure details. They will also be your parents’ contact while you are in the U.S.

Selection. Finalists and alternates were selected by independent panels of experienced educators in the United States. Merit-based selection was based on a complete and comprehensive application, teacher references, English language proficiency, an applicant’s demonstrated preparedness for a year-long exchange experience, and a clearance on health status. All applications were evaluated against established and consistent criteria.

Placement. Placement means your assignment to an American host family. When you receive placement information, you will learn both about your host family and the Placement Organization which will organize your program in the United States.

Orientation. You will attend an orientation program in your home country before leaving for the U.S. You also will have a post-arrival orientation organized locally by your Placement Organization. At these programs you will have classes about living in the U.S., attending an American school, and how to budget and use your allowances.

Arrival. The plans for your arrival in the U.S. will depend on several things. You may attend a Language Program in the U.S., arranged by your Placement Organization, and/or an English language workshop in Moldova, arranged by American Councils. If you attend one or both of these programs, you will travel earlier to the U.S.

Alumni. Once FLEX students return home they will be welcomed by the FLEX alumni community. American Councils coordinates this alumni programming throughout Europe and Eurasia. Alumni meet regularly for discussions, community service activities, viewing of American films, celebration of American holidays, debates, speaker nights, professional development activities, and help with recruitment and orientation of future FLEX students.

There probably will be other students from Europe and Eurasia placed in the geographic area where you will live. During the year there will be activities in which you will be invited to participate with other students.

You are expected to participate in all Program activities. You are about to start an exciting program and a valuable educational experience. Best wishes for your preparation and year in the U.S.



During orientation, you will explore ways to fit into your new Host Family.

CHAPTER 2:

Having Realistic Expectations

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN:

- What you will do as an exchange student
- Your responsibilities and commitments
- How to be successful

The biggest challenge many exchange students face is coping with the difference between what they expected and what living in the U.S. is really like. Often students say: “It’s not what I expected,” “I wanted to live in a big city,” “I wanted to travel and see the U.S.,” “I thought my host family would be very rich.” These students did not understand the exchange experience, and they did not have realistic expectations.

Exchange students usually live with middle-income Americans. Most American middle-income families live in suburban and rural areas, rather than cities. They have single-family homes (as opposed to apartments), and most adult family members work outside of the home. Many are single-parent families. They may have modestly furnished homes, and all family members, regardless of age or sex, share in the household chores: cooking, cleaning, and yardwork. They enjoy locally available sports and activities. They often do not have income that allows for frequent expensive purchases, costly cultural or recreational activities, extensive trips or vacations, or lavish furnishings.

Is this modest description what you expected?

Sometimes host families need to change their expectations, too. Often host families say: “Our student is not like what we read on the application.” “We thought our student would be independent, like American teenagers, wanting to make his own decisions, being able to choose, and able to prepare some of his own meals.” Or, “We expected our student to speak perfect English.” “We thought she would be very interested in trying a different style of life and a different school system.” “We were sure the student would fit into our family right away.”

Does that description fit you?

The hardest time for both students and families can be the first few months together. Why? Because both students and host families “expected” something different than what actually happened. It takes time to find out how other people live and not misunderstand their actions. After some time together, both families and students will understand each other better. They learn what living together and sharing ideas means. Then the family experience begins to be more comfortable for everyone.

What is an exchange experience? These are things you will do during your experience:

- embrace the concept that new things are “Not better, not worse, just different!”;
- take the initiative for making new friends and participating in new activities;
- have a different way of life from your family at home based on your host family’s economic level and the region and town of the U.S. in which you are placed;
- change your habits to fit into the way of life of your host family;
- follow the customs of the U.S. and your host family;
- follow the laws of the U.S., the policies and procedures of the Program, the rules of your host family and your high school;
- study and participate at school;
- learn, have fun, and notice changes in yourself throughout your exchange experience.

Responsibility and Commitment

You will learn about the U.S. while your host family learns about your country. They want to know your ideas and ways of doing things—that is one reason why families host exchange students.

You must make a commitment to yourself to be a good example of your country and culture in the U.S. Most of all, demonstrate a positive regard for others. Be active. Show people that you are interested in doing things with them. Show them that you are enjoying and appreciating your stay. Be flexible. Participate in all types of school and family activities even if they are different from those to which you are accustomed. Be friendly and communicative. Take the responsibility for being a good exchange student.

Understand Your Own Country First

You will meet people in the U.S. who do not know about your country. Compared to the history of your country, the U.S. has a very short history (beginning in 1776). Approximately 46% of Americans hold a passport, often taking vacation somewhere among the 50 states. Until 2007, Americans could travel to Canada and Mexico without a passport, and these were also popular vacation destinations. Today, approximately 20% of Americans speak a second language at home, with Spanish being the most common.

Information about your country may be hard to get in small towns, and many Americans may not know about all of the countries of Europe and Eurasia. Be prepared to share and teach them, and to answer the many questions they will ask.

Some people may ask very naive questions but others will be interested in your country's history, recent politics, current events, and social changes. You should be prepared to answer these questions and discuss how they compare and contrast with the U.S. You will have a wonderful opportunity to teach many people in the U.S. about your country.

Before you leave home, follow your local news sources and learn the issues that are being discussed about your home country in your



Plan to bring some maps or maybe a book about your country to share with your new American community.

community and perhaps abroad. Following your home country's news online will help you know more about what is happening at home and keep you aware of changes taking place in your country, so that you will not be so surprised when you return home.

Plan to bring some photos, a map, and maybe a book on your country. Be prepared to make short presentations about your country to school classes, clubs, or organizations throughout your program year.

Read About the U.S.

While you are in the U.S., you will have many opportunities to learn about this country. Not only will you learn from your family and friends, but you also will see documentary and other TV programs, and may read the newspaper and news magazines. You will be a student of American culture at the same time you are a teacher of your own culture. You were chosen to be an exchange student because the Program has confidence that you can both teach and learn.

Knowing a little about the U.S. before you come will give you something to talk about with your family. It also is good to know what your own news outlets are publishing about the U.S. Americans will ask you what people in your country know and think of the U.S. Can you answer their questions?

Your Personal Growth During the Exchange Experience

As an exchange student, you will be challenged to think about your own country and your own ideas. This experience will allow you to compare and contrast different points of view. You will see a different way of life, meet many new people, and experience situations that your friends at home will not. You may improve your ability to solve problems by yourself and learn how to get along in an unfamiliar place.

From all of your experiences, you should gain confidence in yourself. You may find that you can do things you never thought you could do.

The exchange experience gives you an opportunity to become a citizen of the world, as well as of your own country. Expect to change, grow and enjoy your new experience.

A Successful Experience

Give, respect, learn, be patient. The success of your exchange experience depends mostly on you. The more you give of yourself

to your new family, school, and community, the more people will be interested in you and like you. Your host family has opened their home to you and wants to accept you as a son or daughter for one year. You, in turn, have a **responsibility** to treat your new family with respect and kindness. Learn their ways of doing things and discover your place in the family. Be as patient with them as you would like them to be with you. Put on your best face as you learn to live in a new family.

When you face the small problems or conflicts that arise in any family, talk with your host family. Express your feelings openly and really listen to what family members say to you.

You will be very surprised how often Americans say “thank you” to show their appreciation, and “please” when requesting something. Polite phrases are very important in English. As you speak English, you must learn to use those phrases, too, as they demonstrate manners and respect.

For example, saying “Give me the book” or “Close the door” are commands. They could be rude if said in this manner. By adding polite phrases, they become requests and are much more acceptable: “Please give me the book.” “Thank you.” or “Will you please close the door?” “Thank you.”

It is very important that you express your appreciation to your host family. **Saying “thank you”** shows you have enjoyed something and appreciate what has been done for you. It makes your family feel good and they will feel you are respectful.



Your orientation will take place in your home country before leaving for the U.S.



CHAPTER 3:

Preparing for Your Departure: Documents, Luggage, Finances

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL FIND VERY SPECIFIC INFORMATION ON:

- Medical requirements of U.S. schools
 - What to bring and what not to bring
 - Travel documents and how you will travel
 - What money you will need and receive
- (The chapter ends with a check-list of things to do before you depart for the United States.)

Medical Arrangements

Medical and dental examinations: As a part of your application, you submitted a health certificate. The certificate was completed and signed by your physician and dentist. It is important that the medical information on your health certificate is complete and accurate, especially regarding allergies and medical conditions that require care and monitoring. If your American Councils hub office asks you to provide additional medical documentation, it is important that you do this immediately. Your status as a finalist for the FLEX Program depends on this. The FLEX program rules in Form 8 of the FLEX application and in the Health Certificate Addendum require that students and natural parents inform American Councils of any changes to the student's medical condition that occur after the application was submitted to American Councils.

Immunizations: All U.S. school systems require that any student entering their school for the first time submit:

- Proof of polio immunization
- Proof of Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus (DPT) immunization

- Proof of Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) immunization
- Proof of a Tuberculosis skin or blood test administered within one year of the school start date.

Many schools may also require students to get the Hepatitis B, Meningococcal, Varicella or other vaccinations. Your American Councils representative will contact you if you need to get any additional immunizations before you leave your home country. If you are unable to get required immunizations before your departure, your placement organization will arrange for you get them (at no cost to you) when you arrive to your U.S. host community. If you or your host family pays for any immunizations, the Program will reimburse you if you have a receipt.

Potentially restrictive health conditions: A “potentially restrictive health condition” is one that might limit or affect your ability to take part in everyday activities. A potentially restrictive health condition might also mean that you need additional support or care during your exchange year. Examples of potentially restrictive health conditions could include, for example: severe allergies, asthma, diabetes, heart conditions or gastrointestinal issues. If you have a potentially restrictive health condition you will need a signed and stamped statement from your physician explaining what kind of support you will need during your exchange year from your host family, host school, and Placement Organization. The Program may accept you if the condition will not be made worse by your participation in the Program, and if it will not be a problem for a host family. The information you give the Program must be complete and truthful. This will help your Placement Organization support you during your exchange. Failure to share accurate and complete medical information could endanger your health.

Medication: If you take any medication regularly, bring enough of the medicine for your entire exchange year, if possible. If you have a physician’s prescription for the medication, bring that with you. Also bring a full explanation, in English, of the dosage and purpose of any medicine you are taking. Put any medication and prescriptions you take in the bag you carry on the airplane so you don’t lose it during travel. If you cannot bring a year’s supply of your medicine to the U.S., or if the medication you take is not available without a prescription in the U.S., you will need to see a U.S. doctor. You will need to pay the cost of this doctor visit. The doctor will decide which medication to prescribe. You and your family will be responsible for this and any costs related to pre-existing conditions, including routine visits to the doctor, medical testing, bloodwork, or medication.

U.S. schools do not allow students to bring ANY sort of medication, whether prescription, over the counter, or herbal (also called natural, homeopathic, or traditional), onto school property without special permission. Doing so may result in suspension from school. If you must

take medicine during the school day, ask your placement organization and host family to help you request permission from your host school's nurse and administrators to do this.

Eyeglasses or contact lenses: If you wear glasses or contact lenses, bring a copy of your most recent prescription with you. If you wear glasses, make sure you bring an extra pair. You and your parents are responsible for any costs related to your glasses and contact lenses.

Insurance: Program participants will receive U.S. accident and illness insurance. You will receive basic insurance information, claims filing procedures (how you get money back from the insurance company when you have seen a doctor and paid the bill), claim forms, and an insurance card before your departure to the U.S. Insurance programs vary based on your placement organization, but none of them provide coverage for pre-existing conditions, and generally do not cover chronic conditions or treatment for long-term illnesses that develop on program. It is also important to note that the insurance policy does not cover dental care, which means you must receive any necessary dental treatment before leaving your home country, as dental care in the U.S. is extremely expensive.

School Credit Arrangements

Credit in the U.S. School: "Credit" is the recognition by a school that you have successfully completed courses and met academic requirements. American students go to school for 12 years. Even if you are placed in the 12th year in your American school, the Program cannot guarantee that you will receive an American high school diploma. Many schools, however, give a "Certificate of Attendance" to exchange students. Each school has the authority to decide which type of document is awarded. Neither the Program nor your Placement Organization can influence the school's decision. It will be based on individual school, state, or local policy. You must accept your host school's decision.

Credit in your home country: Before you leave for the U.S., it is your individual responsibility to talk with your school officials in your home country to ask about procedures for requesting credit for attending school in the U.S. As soon as possible, talk with your headmaster or school director about what requirements you may have to meet. Your school may require a description of courses offered in the U.S. It is very difficult to get school documents once you have left a U.S. school, so please be sure you have the necessary papers in hand before you return to your country.

Before leaving your home country, you and your parents should also check on university entrance requirements. It is the student's responsibility to make exam arrangements before they depart for the U.S. Participants may not request to leave the U.S. earlier than May 15th in order to take exams.

Planning What to Take to the U.S.

Pack appropriately. It is important for you to bring enough clothing, gifts for your host family, and some personal items. Do not bring more than you need, or things that are not necessary for your exchange year. The following pages will tell you about baggage restrictions and give you some suggestions about what items you will need while in the U.S.

Most major international airlines allow passengers to check one bag (that meets the airline's size and weight requirements) for free. Most of these airlines charge passengers for their second piece of checked baggage.

American Councils:

- Will not pay for any baggage costs when you leave your country to travel to the United States.
- Will provide you with a travel allowance before you return home at the end of the program year. This allowance can be used to pay for travel-related costs.

If you are flying domestically in your country before your international flight, find out the baggage allowances (number of pieces and weight) on the domestic airline. There may be additional travel-related fees for travel within your country, and you are responsible for these. Sometimes the weight limit is less than what international airlines allow. American Councils will not pay for any baggage fees on domestic flights in your country. It is your responsibility to decide how much baggage to take and to pay for any excess baggage charges.

Most major international airlines allow passengers to carry one personal item and one bag on the plane, called "carry-on" baggage, both of which must be a certain size and weight, and must fit in the overhead bin or underneath the seat in front of the passenger. If your personal item or carry-on bag is too big, the airline will make you check the item, and might make you pay a fee for this. Contact your airline to find out the weight and size requirements.

- The personal item can be something like a purse, a laptop bag, or a small backpack.
- The carry-on bag can be a small wheeled bag or a duffle bag.

You will be responsible for carrying and keeping track of your own baggage. Do not take more than you personally can carry at one time. You will not be allowed to rent or use a cart to carry your baggage while at the airport, because you will be traveling in a large group. Remember that you will leave the U.S. at the end of your exchange year with more belongings than when you arrived. Keep this in mind when packing. **If your bags are overweight, you will be responsible for paying the overweight baggage fee, or you will be forced to leave some of your belongings behind.** The Program does not pay for overweight baggage costs.

Suggested Basic Clothing List for the U.S.

For everyone:

- 1 jacket
- 1 raincoat
- 3 warm sweaters
- 3 pairs of pants
- 2 sets of sleepwear
- special clothing for sports
- 7-10 complete changes of underwear
- 1 bathing suit
- 1 pair walking/gym shoes
- 1 pair special occasion shoes
- 1 pair everyday shoes



Formal wear:

- 3 shirts/blouses
- dress pants OR skirt/dress
- 1 sports coat (jacket) OR a special occasion dress

Clothing: Program participants will live in all parts of the U.S. The U.S. is so large and the weather so varied that it is difficult to recommend exactly what to take. For appropriate clothing for the region in which you will live, look online to get more information about the weather. You might need to buy some clothes while in the U.S., especially if you come from a region with a very different climate. Your incidentals allowance (see page 17) can help you buy appropriate clothes if you do not have them.

Refer to the basic clothing list. You may need to adjust it when you learn about the region of the U.S. where you will live or if you receive an email from your host family with ideas for clothing to take. If you have them, you should take more sweaters, shirts or blouses, and pants than are on the list. Americans change their clothing daily, at least undergarments and shirts or blouses. These items are washed after one wearing. Consider bringing one traditional outfit from your home country for your cultural presentations.

Gifts: Think carefully about the gifts you will take to your host family. The cost is not important; it is your thoughtfulness in taking something from your country that is important. When choosing gifts, do not forget to consider their size and weight. They must go into your baggage. Americans appreciate even small gifts. **DO NOT** wrap your gifts. **Some gifts that you could take:**

- Handicrafts of your country or region.
- Picture book of the country or region you are from, showing geography, historical places, views of rural and city life, etc.
- Photos of your own family, friends, house, school, community, country.
- Special foods of your region or country, such as fruit preserves, candy, etc., but not those prohibited. (See list below.)

Some things from home: Do not forget to take along a few things that you enjoy and can share with others. Here are some ideas:

- Photo album of family, home, friends, school, and country.
- Your favorite music.
- Equipment for your favorite sports.
- Hobby materials—for drawing, painting, collecting, reading, or whatever you like to do when you have free time. (If you are serious about music, you may want to rent an instrument in the U.S. rather than take your own. Customs laws of your country may make taking a musical instrument out of the country difficult.)
- A few books you would like to read in your native language.
- A book about your country, school publication, or recent magazines to show to your new family and friends.

Think about what things you might like to have while away from home. They should be things that are pleasurable for you. They also will help you share some important parts of your life with your American family and friends.

Do not take the following:

- Knives, swords, other sharp objects, or pistols as the airlines will confiscate them for security reasons. These items are also unacceptable in schools and in many homes in the U.S.
- Vodka, champagne, or any alcoholic drink.
- Fresh food (including cheese, sausage), plants, or flowers. U.S. law prohibits taking these products into the U.S.
- Electrical equipment, unless it uses exactly 120V/60Hz current or you have a transformer. Battery-powered equipment, of course, can be used anywhere.



Photos of historical or famous buildings in your country will be of interest to your host family and new friends.

Finances

Allowance: The Program does not pay your host family. Families host FLEX students because they are interested in learning about other countries and in sharing their lifestyle. By giving you a home and meals and by accepting you as a family member, your host family pays the largest portion of your living costs.

You will receive a monthly allowance of \$200 USD from your Placement Organization. This is to pay for things such as school supplies, toiletries, social activities and phone cards/your phone bills. You will need to pay for your own bus fares, snacks, gifts, phone calls, movies, sports events, and meals out with friends. You must buy your own personal items, such as shampoo and deodorant. If you travel with your school, class, or host family, you will probably have to help pay for the trip. It is your responsibility to pay for your own personal items and social/cultural activities.

Here are some sample costs of items in U.S. dollars. Prices will vary in different parts of the country:

- School football/basketball game: **\$5-\$10**
- Movies: **\$8-\$15** per person
- Rollerskating: **\$10-\$15**
- Bowling: **\$7-\$12**
- McDonald's (for lunch): **\$8-\$16**, average
- Music concert: **\$40-\$150**
- School notebook: **\$3-5**

At the end of the school year, many students wish to buy special

school souvenirs. Upper classes may have special class rings which may cost as much as \$90-200. Some important school dances may cost \$15-\$25 a person. The formal, end-of-the-year dance, the Prom, may cost \$50-\$120 a couple or more, not including elegant clothing which students may buy or rent.

Incidentals allowance: An additional \$300 USD will be available to help pay for program-related items. This money will not be given directly either to you or your host family upon your arrival in the U.S. Your host family will be reimbursed for appropriate expenditures. Therefore, you and your host family should decide together how this allowance could best be used. To avoid any confusion about the distribution of the incidentals allowance, and the expenses that it can cover, you should discuss the details of your incidentals allowance with your local representative in the U.S.

A few examples of appropriate incidentals allowance expenditures are clothes for physical education class, a lock for your school locker, or a yearbook. Once you and your host family have made purchases, receipts must be submitted to the Placement Organization for reimbursement. Note: It is usually a good idea not to spend all this money at once. You may need some of it for later in the program year—to purchase a school yearbook, for example. Each school produces a yearbook that has photos of students, teachers and activities. Yearbooks cost as much as \$50-100.

Budgeting: Making a budget means planning how you will spend the money you have. You will need to learn to budget your incidentals allowance and monthly allowance carefully. It is important to use your allowance for school and daily expenses and not save it all for gifts, or expensive electronic equipment, to take home at the end of the year. A part of your exchange experience is to participate in many aspects of family and school life and you will need to pay for some of the things you do. You will learn about budgeting money at your pre-departure orientation (PDO). Your host family can help you, too.

Using your monthly allowance: The money you receive each month is to help you participate in school and community events with your family and friends. It will let you go to sports and music events, get a soda or hamburger with friends, buy toiletries and other things.

If you choose to save your allowance rather than use it, it means either you are not participating in activities, or expecting friends or your host family to pay for you. **This is not acceptable.** It will cause you to lose friends or to have difficulties with your host family. Most other exchange students must provide their own spending money; they do not receive allowances.

You will find that many American teenagers earn some of their own money. If you have the time and opportunity, you also may be able to

earn money by doing informal part-time jobs for neighbors, such as cutting grass or babysitting. This type of small, part-time work is not a violation of your U.S. visa. These small jobs do not pay a lot, but they help, and provide you with an opportunity to participate in a common American teenage activity. According to the terms of your U.S. visa, you are not allowed to be employed on either a full or part-time basis; you may only accept sporadic or intermittent employment such as the examples described above.

Borrowing and lending money: Standards of living vary around the world, and even within the U.S. Sometimes there is a difference between the amount of money you can spend and the amount your host family or friends can spend. It is not a good idea to borrow or lend money, even with your host family. It can make your relationship difficult. It may be difficult for you or for them to repay debts. If your host family lends you money in an emergency, give them a written receipt and pay them back immediately. If you choose to loan money, always get a receipt, even if the loan is to someone in your host family. If you have problems with money, tell your Placement Organization immediately. If, on the other hand, you have more spending money than your host family has, try to be sensitive to this and do not flaunt (show off) it by making excessive and/or expensive purchases.

Remember that you are to participate as a family member. Do not expect your host family to provide you with expensive items and experiences. You are not a guest; participate and appreciate being a member of the family.

Carrying money while traveling: It is important for you to change any money you will bring with you into U.S. dollars before leaving home. Never put cash in luggage. Carry it with you in a protected pocket, purse or wallet.

The FLEX program provides you with the money you will need in the U.S. You are encouraged not to bring large amounts of money with you. Furthermore, the customs officials of your country may require a document which will allow you to take more than a designated amount of U.S. dollars out of your country. It is your responsibility to find out about any restrictions on taking out U.S. dollars, and to procure necessary documents.

Bank accounts: You should open a bank account in the U.S. You can have an account in your own name. You will need to fill out a W-8 form to open a bank account as a non-U.S. citizen resident. The bank will have this form. Keep track of what you spend and keep your bank statements as a record. Remember to close your account before you go home. If you have any problems with money or your bank account, ask your host family for help. If problems continue, immediately inform your Placement Organization.

Travel Documents

Before You Leave:

- **Passport:** To enter the U.S. you need a valid international passport issued by your country. If you hold a valid international passport, check with the appropriate authorities to make sure a new type of passport has not replaced the type you have. If you do not have a valid international passport, the Program representative in your country will give you advice on how to obtain one.
- **DS-2019:** When your acceptance and host family are confirmed, the Program will help process a U.S. government Form DS-2019 (also known as “Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor J-1 Status”). This form permits you to receive your U.S. visa. This form, together with your passport, goes to the U.S. Consulate when you apply for your visa. You will have assistance with this step from your American Councils representative. The form shows the dates that you may legally be in the U.S. Keep this form and take it back home with you at the end of the year.
- **U.S. Visa:** A visa is a stamp or sticker that the U.S. Consulate puts in your passport. It gives you permission to **enter** the U.S. It is good only for entry into the U.S., unlike your DS-2019, which states how long you may **remain** in the U.S. Program participants come to the U.S. on J-1 visas. These are “non-immigrant, exchange visitor” visas. When in the U.S. on this visa, you may not work at formal jobs and you must attend school. This is not a tourist visa and it is valid only while you are on the Program. Because you are coming to the U.S. on a government exchange, the visa you receive requires you to return to your country at the end of the exchange program. The U.S. visa issued to you will not be amended or extended beyond the Program end date.
- **Permission to travel without parents:** In many countries, a child must have with him/her a parental permission to travel. This document, a notarized, witnessed declaration or power of attorney, permits a minor to leave the country without his/her parents. Your American Councils representative will provide you with information on this and any other documents you may need to obtain from your country, such as an exit/transit visa.
- **Exit customs form:** You may have a customs form from your country and/or the country in which your international departure airport is located. These forms usually require information about you (name, nationality, etc.) and about what you are taking with you. The amount of currency you are carrying must be declared. Usually there are questions about whether you are taking any weapons, narcotics, or antiques (old, valuable examples of your country’s crafts). You should not take gifts that are antiques. Sometimes musical instruments are considered antiques. Do not take any meat or fish, cheese, plant products, other living things,



alcoholic beverages, or gifts that are or resemble. with you. These items will be confiscated by U.S. customs officials.

Travel Arrangements

Departure from home: If you have not traveled before, you may be a little nervous about it. This section of your handbook will help you feel more confident because in it you will learn how to read an airline ticket as well as find out some other details about FLEX program travel.

You and your family will be notified by your American Councils representative about your travel arrangements. You will probably go to an international departure city for one night and then fly to the U.S. The Program will reimburse you for your train or plane ticket from your home to the designated departure city, providing you present your used ticket. They will not reimburse for the ticket of family members or anyone else.

All students on the FLEX program will travel to the U.S. on flights arranged by the Program. Students will travel to the U.S. in groups on regularly scheduled commercial flights. There will be an adult with the group called a “flight leader.” The flight leader represents FLEX during your international travel and will help you if you need it.

Baggage: Most major international airlines allow passengers to check one bag (that meets the airline’s size and weight requirements) for free. Most of these airlines charge passengers for their second piece of checked baggage. American Councils:

- Will not pay for any baggage costs when you leave your country to travel to the United States.
- Will provide you with a travel allowance before you return home at the end of the program year. This allowance can be used to pay for travel-related costs.

See the “Planning What to Take to the U.S.” section for details. If any of your bags go over the airline’s limits, you must pay the overweight charges.

DO NOT lock or wrap your baggage. This especially includes your checked baggage. If you lock your baggage and it needs to be examined by security officials, they will break the lock, perhaps also causing damage to your baggage. Visit www.TSA.gov for more information about acceptable locks. If you wrap your baggage, you will need to unwrap it before traveling in the U.S. Security officials will not allow you to re-check wrapped baggage.

Never leave baggage out of your sight while traveling. Baggage left unattended in an airport may be stolen, or it may be destroyed by

security officers. If you must leave your baggage for a brief time, be sure another member of the group you are traveling with watches it for you.

Travel to the U.S.

You will travel from your home to your international departure city. In that city, there will be a Travel Meeting the evening before your departure. Your American Councils representative will give you your international ticket and explain your travel route. You also will receive a FLEX t-shirt, which must be worn at all times until you reach your host family.

Your Placement Organization will tell your host parents the date and time of your arrival. Your host parents or the organization's representative will meet you at your final destination.

Arrival in the U.S.

Once your plane arrives at Washington-Dulles International Airport ("Dulles"), you will go through immigration. You will be asked to put your fingers on a touchpad so that the officer can scan your fingerprints, and the officer will take your picture with a digital camera. The officer will check your passport, the visa stamped in it and your DS-2019 form. Then the officer will scan your passport, generating an electronic arrival record (I-94). Lastly, the officer will stamp your passport, which officially admits you into the U.S.

Keep the DS-2019 form and your passport in a secure place at all times. If you lose this form or your passport, contact your Placement Organization immediately.

Next you will go to the baggage area. You will claim your checked baggage. If your baggage has been lost, you must fill out a lost baggage claim form before exiting the baggage area.

Once you have your baggage you will exit into the main arrivals hall, where you will be met by FLEX staff who will take you to a hotel. You will have dinner and spend the night there before traveling on to your host family the following day. A few host families will live near Dulles; in those cases, your host family or local representative will pick you up at the airport, and you will not overnight with the rest of your group.

Travel to your host family

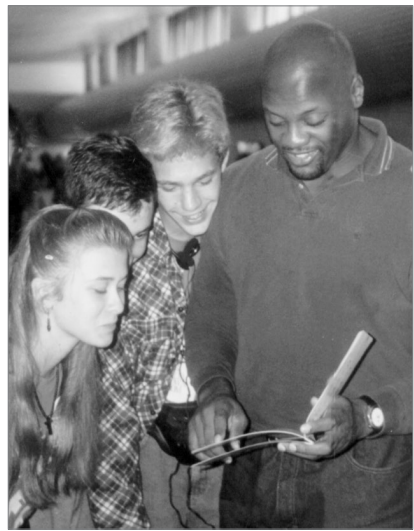
If you are flying to another city, your travel will continue the next day. At this time FLEX airport staff will assist you with checking in for your flight and give you any travel instructions you need. It is important to

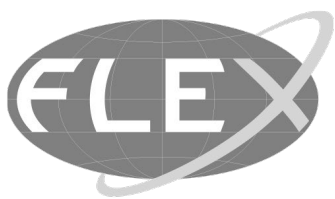


listen carefully to them and let them know if you have any questions or you don't understand everything they say.

Sometimes students must change planes in another city by themselves. If this happens to you, the airline employees can help you if you have questions. If you are too excited or nervous to speak English, you can use the "Quick Reference Guide on Travel to and Within the U.S." This guide has messages to show to the person who helps you if you are having difficulties finding your way through the airport. If you are having other travel problems, call the toll-free number in the Guide. This call will not cost you any money. FLEX travel staff are available at all times at that phone number.







2025-26

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

for travel to and within the United States



Call

1-800-841-6460

for any travel emergency

On the next page is a sample electronic ticket (e-ticket). Take some time to familiarize yourself with this document. American Councils staff will give you your e-ticket at the Travel Meeting held in your capital city the night before you travel to the U.S. You can see that the top portion of the e-ticket contains technical information and abbreviations that make sense to the airline; the lower part spells your itinerary out in clear language that makes sense to you. It also includes FREE telephone numbers that you can call if you have problems while traveling in Europe or the U.S. When calling the U.S. number, FLEX travel staff will help you make new flight reservations and will call your Placement Organization, who will inform your host family of your new flight. You may call the number anytime during travel that you need to until you reach your final destination and someone meets you there. There is no cost or charge for calling this number.

Air travel in the U.S. is usually very efficient, but sometimes travel plans don't work as scheduled. Weather, mechanical problems, and/or late departures may cause you to miss the connecting flight on which you have been scheduled. Try not to be upset if this happens to you. No one likes to have a long wait in the airport or to overnight unexpectedly while traveling, but these are things that may happen. If this happens to you when the airport staff is there, they will schedule you on new flights and make overnight arrangements, if necessary. They will contact your host family, giving them your new arrival time.

Your trip to the U.S. will be exciting. If you read and understand the information here and that which you will receive from your American Councils representative, you will be prepared.

Flights / E-Tickets Details

This is an important travel document. Please present it to the airline agent upon check in and keep it with you all the time.

Student Number:	2021-011-123456
Last Name:	SMIRNOV
First Name:	IVAN
Country:	KYRGYZSTAN
Final Destination:	MADISON, WI
Placing Organization:	S4-H
Flight Date:	AUG 06, 2020
ITIN:	KC 110H 05AUG FRUALA HK 0755PM 0845PM 05AUG KC*7BXUVL LH 649S 06AUG ALAFRA HK 0210AM 0655AM 06AUG LH*7BXUVL UA 988S 06AUG FRAIAD HK 1220PM 0310PM 06AUG UA*H0MVX0 UA 363S 07AUG IADORD HK 0853AM 0950AM 07AUG UA*H0MVX0 UA 5849S 07AUG ORDMSN HK 1200PM 1247PM 07AUG UA*H0MVX0
E-TKT:	ELECTRONIC TICKET RECORD INV: CUST: PNR:HNIIHN TKT:0165712023549 ISSUED:28JUL14 PCC:5UL1 IATA:23234363 NAME: SMIRNOV / IVAN NAME REF:20080020230514 TOUR ID:IT8UA2814AS FOP: CPN A/L FLT CLS DATE BRDOFF TIME ST F/B STAT 1 KC 110H V 05AUG FRUALA 1955 OK VPAXACSD OPEN 2 LH 649S V 05AUG ALAFRA 0210 OK VPAXACSD OPEN 3 UA 988S V 06AUG FRAIAD 1220 OK VPAXACSD OPEN 4 UA 363S V 07AUG IADORD 0853 OK VPAXACSD OPEN 5 UA 5849 V 07AUG ORDMSN 1200 OK VPAXACSD OPEN VLD UA/LH ONLY/ATS1

Departure Date	Departure Time	Departure City	Airline	Flight Number	Arrival Date	Arrival Time	Arrival City
08/05	07:55 PM	Bishkek Chuy, Kyrgyzstan	AIR ASTANA	110	08/05	08:45 PM	Almaty, Kazakhstan
08/06	02:10 AM	Almaty, Kazakhstan	Lufthansa (Germany)	649	08/06	06:55 AM	Frankfurt [Rhein-Main], Germany
6-Aug	12:20 PM	Frankfurt [Rhein-Main], Germany	United Airlines	988	6-Aug	3:10 PM	WASHINGTON DULLES, DC
7-Aug	8:53 AM	WASHINGTON DULLES, DC	United Airlines	363	7-Aug	9:50 AM	CHICAGO OHARE, IL
7-Aug	12:00 PM	CHICAGO OHARE, IL	United Airlines	5849	7-Aug	12:47 PM	Madison, WI

FLEX Travel Emergency Phone: USA: 1-800-841-6460

**Germany: 0800-SKYLINK
+49800-7595465**

Pre-Departure Checklist

You have many things to think about as you get ready for your exchange experience. To help you remember the important things, look at the checklist on pages 29-30. Everything on it is necessary. Be sure you do everything. Check off each task as you complete it so you know it is done. Good luck!



Clothing and equipment for your favorite sport is something you might want to bring from home.

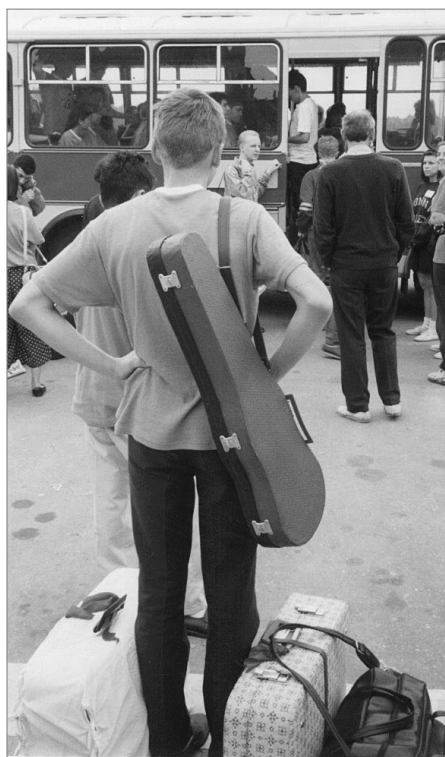
Pre-Departure Checklist

- _____ 1. Read this Student Handbook with your parents so you all know what to expect and how to prepare.
- _____ 2. Make sure your parents read their materials about the FLEX program.
- _____ 3. Send an email or call your local American Councils representative to confirm your acceptance of this program no later than two weeks from the date you are notified of your status.
- _____ 4. Get an international passport. Verify with the appropriate authorities that it is valid for overseas travel.
- _____ 5. Get a "permission to travel without parents" document if required by officials in your country.
- _____ 6. Get immunizations required for school, if directed.
- _____ 7. Get a letter from your doctor if you have any restrictive medical conditions.
- _____ 8. Prepare a current academic transcript to provide to your U.S. host high school.
- _____ 9. Talk to your home school about requirements for accepting credit from your U.S. high school, and/or taking equivalency examinations when you return.
- _____ 10. Your host family will be selected based on what you wrote on your application. If anything has changed (smoking, health, other important information), inform the Program immediately and explain.
- _____ 11. Make a list of any prescription or non-prescription medications, including eyeglasses, etc., to carry to the U.S. Also, make copies of your prescriptions.
- _____ 12. Get extra prescription medication you will need while in the U.S. (Don't forget to pack these in "carry-on" luggage.)
- _____ 13. Buy a two-language dictionary for English and your native language, or download a dictionary with English and your native language on your devices.
- _____ 14. Buy or prepare clothing you need from the basic list.

Pre-Departure Checklist is continued on the next page.

- **15.** Choose some small gifts for your host family. Do not wrap them. NO alcohol, sharp objects, or perishables.
- 16.** Choose the personal items from home you will take.
- **17.** Pack your luggage yourself so its size and weight are acceptable to the airline, and so you can carry it yourself. Know everything that is in your luggage.
- **18.** Pack this handbook in your carry-on luggage. You will need it! Also pack the Introduction to the USA workbook.

Your local American Councils office will give you a neck pouch and travel envelope in which to keep the following: airline ticket, passport with DS-2019 form attached, parental permission to travel, special medical information from your physician (if needed), a pen, and information on your host family: name, address, and phone number. (Some of these things you will get at the Travel Meeting.) Put this packet in your carry-on luggage.



Take a musical instrument only if you have checked with customs officials in your country. Sometimes instruments are considered antiques and are not allowed out of the country.

CHAPTER 4:

Preparing Yourself for the Cultural Experience

IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL LEARN THESE IDEAS ABOUT LIVING IN A DIFFERENT COUNTRY:

- A new definition of culture
- How living in a different country can produce a reaction called ‘culture shock’
- How you can adjust to life in a new country

Your Cultural Preparation

Many students come to the U.S. with all of the right clothes, documents, and other things from home, but they have not prepared for their trip in the most important way—that is, in their attitudes and understanding of themselves, their community, and their country. Your understanding of yourself, together with your desire to learn, your curiosity, and your openness to new things, will help you more than anything else you can bring.

Understanding Yourself as a Product of Your Own Culture

Culture. One definition of culture is the attitudes, beliefs, and ideas that a group of people hold in common. Culture is not only cathedrals, special ways of dressing, or folk dances. Rather, buildings and dances are reflections of the values of the people who built them or do them. They show something about the beliefs or ideas of the people of that country.

Your culture. You have some opinions and ideas that are uniquely yours. But many of your attitudes and beliefs are generally the same

as those of your family, your community, and your fellow citizens. You learned to think the way you do because you were taught to do so. So were all other young people in your country. But not all the people in the world think the same way. Because your friends and neighbors may have the same views and opinions that you do, you may not realize that other people may have different ideas.

Your host culture. The exchange program offers you the special opportunity to live with people who have very different backgrounds from your own. This opportunity to live with people who have different attitudes and beliefs will give you a better understanding of your own ideas. It will also give you a very good understanding of how people in the U.S. think. Best of all, the exchange program gives you the chance to see that many ideas are common to all people.

Acceptance. It is important to appreciate and accept the fact that everyone has his or her own way of looking at the world. It is also important to be able to notice differences without saying one view is right and one is wrong. You should be careful not to let your own beliefs and attitudes prevent you from enjoying the different life around you in the U.S. You will be the person moving into a new environment. Adjusting to it is necessary to have a successful exchange experience.

Adjustment. If adjusting to life in the U.S. becomes difficult, it may be because of a conflict between the ideas and beliefs you find in the U.S. and your own. If you know this, you will be able to understand why you sometimes find it hard to live in another country. The section below explains the adjustment process you will experience and gives you ideas on how to adapt to your new environment.

Culture Shock

When you live in a new country, many of the things you are accustomed to are missing or done differently. You must think about how to do even the simplest things. For example, perhaps in your country you embrace and kiss people on the cheek to greet them. In the U.S., you may shake hands, but mostly you will just say “hello.” There are hundreds and hundreds of little things, such as greeting people, that are different in each country.

When you first live in a new country, it is fun to see the differences and to learn how to do things differently. Sometimes, however, you get tired of having to remember how to do so many things differently. You may feel that everything is different; nothing seems familiar or comfortable to you. This is very common. Almost everyone who lives in a different country feels this way sometimes. When this is a problem for you, it is called “culture shock.”

Your understanding of yourself, together with your desire to learn, your curiosity, and your openness to new things, will help you adjust to life in the U.S.



Culture shock means that your mind is tired of having to think about everything. You are tired of having to analyze and understand all the new things you see. If you get very tired, your mind stops trying to understand so much, and you may withdraw. Instead of trying to adjust to the new society, you may become quiet and prefer to think of home, where you felt more comfortable. You may even feel confused or angry or isolated. You might think people don't like you. You may feel lonely. You can even wonder if you can get along in such a strange place.

Culture shock happens to most people. If you experience culture shock, you should not think that you have failed or that you cannot be a good exchange student. But you do need to talk about it or write down how you feel. Your host family and Placement Organization representative know about culture shock and may be able to help you understand your feelings. Writing in a diary is also a useful way of expressing what is bothering you. This will help a great deal.

How will you know if you have “culture shock”?

Some of the common physical indications:

- I am eating more or less than I usually do.
- I am sleeping too much or too little.
- I have to go to the bathroom more than usual.
- I have stomach aches or headaches that I usually do not have.
- I cry more than I usually do.

Some other indicators:

- I feel helpless and think I need help from people of my own country.
- I get angry more often and at things that are not very important.
- I don't want to learn more English or even speak the English I know.
- I am always thinking I will be cheated, robbed, or injured.
- I am afraid to go to new places and do new things.
- I am very homesick—I wish I were back home.

What can you do if you think you have culture shock?

Here are some easy things to do:

- Remember that most people living in or visiting foreign countries have these feelings. Do not worry that you are “the only one” who feels this way.
- Try to decide what particular things are bothering you, no matter how small or unimportant. It may help to write them down.
- Analyze the differences between your beliefs and ideas and those of the people with whom you are living in the U.S. Which ones seem in conflict?
- Develop an attitude that you can learn to live with these differences. Do not worry that you will lose your own culture; it is a part of who you are. But you can try living in the new country, and you can do it successfully.
- Plan small tasks each day that will help you meet people and accomplish something—like preparing a new food to eat, talking to someone new, and accepting an invitation to go somewhere. And do each task!
- Find the humor in some of the difficulties. Being able to laugh at some of your mistakes is healthy.
- Do some exercise or sport each day, even if it is only taking a walk.
- Eat regularly and eat healthy foods.
- Write an email to your organization's representative, if you don't feel like talking.
- Relax, take a deep breath, and be glad you have the opportunity to live in a country different from your own. Learn to accept the new ideas and ways of life without forgetting your own.

Adjustment: As you improve your English and begin to get around by yourself, you will feel more comfortable in your new home, school, and community. You are likely to be more interested in the people of your host country and you will even be able to laugh at the little things that once bothered you. Then you are on your way to adjusting to life in the U.S.

Remember that most exchange students go through a difficult period. But it is just a step on the way to adjusting to a new lifestyle.

Try not to send your natural parents unhappy emails or call home about each problem. You may find that what is bothering you one day may be resolved in the next day or two, but your family will not know. They will worry and feel they need to call you or call their local Program representative to ask about you. Try not to overreact to small difficulties. They will usually pass quickly.

Rather than calling your natural parents, talk with your host parents. They are near to you and can help you quickly. As you begin to rely on them and solve problems yourself, you will feel more comfortable. You will become more confident that you can adjust to your new lifestyle.

There are many people who can support you - see Chapter 9 for more information.





Talk with your host parents or your local representative about problems you have adjusting to your life in the U.S.

When you are better adjusted, you will accept most U.S. customs as just another way of living. You will feel comfortable with daily life and experience fewer anxious moments. With better adjustment you will not only accept the food, drinks, habits, and customs, but actually begin to enjoy some of them. As you adjust, you will see that the environment does not change. Your attitude toward it changes. You will begin to understand why the people in the U.S. live as they do and you will communicate better. The sooner you do this, the sooner little problems will begin to disappear and you will feel more comfortable living in the United States.

CHAPTER 5:

Getting Settled in the U.S.

IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL READ HOW FORMER EXCHANGE STUDENTS LEARNED TO:

- Live as a member of an American family
- Make friends in the U.S.
- Be an American high school student
- Live in an American community

Your Host Family

The most important part of getting settled in the USA is becoming a **member** of your host family. As soon as your local American Councils office provides you with your host family's contact information, contact them! They have invited you to be a member of their family for the year, not a guest. That means you need to learn how they work and live together so that you can fit in. Host families are of different races and ethnic origins. They have different lifestyles based on such factors as education, salary, geography, and religion. Some families will have children, others will not. What they will have in common is an eagerness to welcome you into their home and to share their lives with you. Your experience in America will depend on your efforts to learn about and understand all kinds of American lifestyles. It is one of the most important parts of the FLEX program.

Exchange students usually live with a family in a suburb of a larger city or in a small town or rural area. Since maps often list only larger cities, when you receive your host family's address, you may not find the name of the suburb, town, or city on maps of the United States.

Families who live in smaller towns and rural areas usually have single-family homes and are thus more likely to host exchange students than those living in big cities, where the cost of living is higher. In most American homes, there are several bedrooms: one for the parents and one or more for individual children or for siblings to share.

Sometimes students are initially disappointed to be placed with a family in a rural area or a small town. That disappointment is not considered an appropriate reason to change host families. Most students placed in small towns and rural areas learn to enjoy that lifestyle and the chance to know everyone living in that area.

In the U.S., a small town is one with fewer than 30,000 people. “Rural” means that there might be fewer than 8,000 people within an area where the economy is dependent upon farming. When Americans think of rural areas they tend to think of open land where farmers have large, industrialized farms. The average size of a farm in the U.S. is 450 acres (182 hectares).

If you live in a small town or rural area, everyone will meet you. You may be the first person from your country that people living in a small town have ever met. One student said, “At home I lived among three million people and my town in the U.S. had 4,000. It was a pretty small town. Whenever people asked me, ‘Who are you living with?’ they knew my host family when I said their name! That’s what I liked. Everybody knew everybody. It was pretty easy to communicate.”

Wherever you live, you will spend most of your time in school and with the host family. Rural areas and small towns may have small elementary and middle schools, but frequently have large high schools that bring students from long distances by school bus. The school will provide after-school activities, including sports and clubs. Your home should have all the conveniences of homes in bigger cities.

Here are some suggestions to think about and talk over with your host family.

Household schedules. Every family has developed a routine for how they live. Each family’s routine or schedule is different, depending on how many family members there are, how many people work outside of the home, how old the children are, or what they do for hobbies or recreation.

It is important to watch, ask about, and learn what your family does and at what times. Ask your family about the time they eat breakfast and dinner and if everyone is expected to eat together. When to bathe or shower and what to do with dirty clothes are other family behavior patterns or “rules.” **Learn what your family’s rules are and follow them.**

An important part of the family schedule is the use of the family car. Americans are very dependent upon their cars because of the distances between homes and services and a lack of effective public transportation. You will have to fit into the family's transportation schedule when you need rides to special events. In time, you may make friends who drive and can give you rides.

Personal hygiene: Customs of how one bathes (or showers), and how often, vary from country to country. Some people think Americans are too concerned about cleanliness and body odor. But it is customary in the U.S. to shower or bathe every day and change into clean underclothes. When the weather is warm, shirts or blouses are worn only once before washing. (In fact, all clothes are washed frequently. Washing machines and laundry soap do not damage clothes.) Both men and women use underarm deodorants, and women generally shave underarms and legs. Body odor is offensive to Americans but they may not feel comfortable discussing it.

Some people from other countries may consider these daily rituals unnecessary. However, personal hygiene probably will be very important to your host family. *Do your part by being a good family member and developing these habits from the beginning of your stay in the U.S.*

Personal space: You may have your own bedroom or you may share one with your host brothers or sisters of the same sex. Remember that even though you have some "personal space," your room is still a part of your host family's house. You will be expected to keep your room clean and neat, including your closet and dresser drawers. Making your own bed should become a part of getting up in the morning. It is one of the first duties most children in the U.S. learn. Families also have rules about where dirty clothes are kept for washing. Follow their rules.

You also will share common areas of the house. Be respectful of other family members and take your own things from these areas and put them where they belong.

Privacy: Most Americans think that everyone needs to be alone sometimes. You will need privacy and other family members will, too. Try to find out the times your host family is usually together and when they go to different rooms. This is important. You may not be used to doing many things alone or in another room. It is not because family members don't like each other. It is just customary for Americans to do some things individually.

If you spend too much time in your room, however, your family may worry that you are unhappy or sick. You also will miss opportunities to share time with your family. Try to spend the "family times" with them. Family times may be dinner, immediately after dinner, or on weekends.

Find out what these times are in your home. Spending time together could mean eating together, just talking, playing games, watching TV, or going out together. On the other hand, your family will expect that you need time to read and study. They will think you will want to do these things quietly, probably by yourself.

Household chores: Home life in the U.S. may be very different from, or quite similar to, life in your own country. A “family” in the U.S. may consist of two parents or a single parent, with a child or children at home or who are grown and no longer live at home. Sometimes other relatives live in the home. Most women hold jobs outside of their homes. In the U.S., this means that all members of the family, men, women, and children, usually share the duties and jobs around the house.

In most American families, everyone is expected to do all types of “chores.” Chores are the various tasks done in and around the house. Boys and men help with the cooking, cleaning, and dishwashing. If it is difficult for you as a young man to do certain tasks because of your beliefs, you need to discuss this with your host family. Perhaps you can determine what other chores you can do more comfortably.



Spend time with your host family. This will help you understand each other better, and will make your adjustment to American life easier.



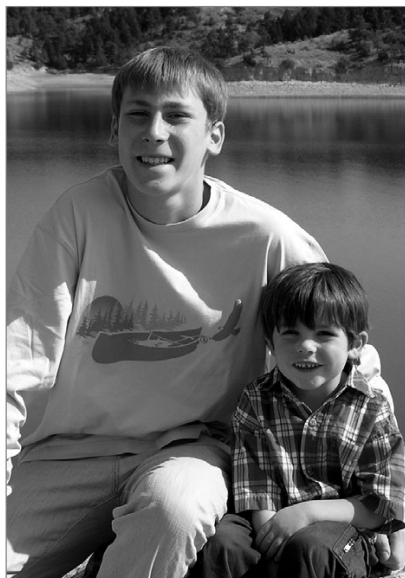
You will need to do your share of the household chores when you live in an active family in which all members must help with the housework.

From a young age, most American children learn to take care of their own rooms and help with little chores like emptying wastebaskets and washing dishes. Teenagers frequently have regular duties such as cutting the grass, washing the car, vacuuming, or helping wash and iron clothes. A part of growing up in the U.S. is being responsible for doing chores. In some families children earn weekly spending money for doing specific chores. Very early they learn the importance of work and earning money. They usually can use their spending money for snacks or books or even clothes.

It is a very good idea for you to talk to your family about what household jobs you should do. Also, ask how to do them. For example, ask them to show you how to use their vacuum cleaner or washing machine. Your host family may not know that your natural family has different systems or machines. They may not think about explaining how to do things. Ask them to demonstrate so you will feel comfortable using their equipment.

Breakfast: American families are very active and busy. In the mornings, each family member may prepare his or her own breakfast before leaving the house. If you are accustomed to having your mother or grandmother prepare a breakfast meal for you, this may be an adjustment. It may mean learning what things are available for breakfast and opening the refrigerator and kitchen cupboard to get your own food. You may not even find the same foods that you eat at home. You will need to learn what the different foods are, where they are kept, and what you may eat for breakfast and for snacks. You may have to learn how to prepare some of your own meals! Remember, ask questions!

Share yourself. Your host family has invited you to live with them because they want to get to know you and learn about your country. They want to share their ideas and help you understand the U.S. and how Americans live and think. Spend time with each member of your family. If your host parents are home when you return from school, talk to them about your day and theirs. Talk to them about things you do not understand. Ask if you can help them with the chores in the afternoon.



Make a special effort to spend time with the children in your host family.

At dinner time, join in the family conversations so you can get to know your host family. Find out about your host parents' work and what family members do for fun. You can share some hobbies, like going to a football game or a concert with the family, or bike riding with host brothers and sisters.

Make a special effort to spend time with the children in the family, if there are any. It is especially important to show interest in host brothers and sisters your own age as well as those who are younger than you. It is easy for them to become jealous because of the attention you receive. They, too, must adjust to having a new family member in the house. Try to teach them about your own customs while asking and learning from them about theirs. Respect their private times and their own friends. You will not necessarily be best friends with your host brothers and sisters, but you should be friendly with them.

For many American families, participation in religious services and other activities at a religious center is very important. Even if you do not share their religious beliefs, this is another important way you can learn about your host family and American institutions and share their lives. (There is more about religion beginning on page 66.)

Show appreciation. Very few things are more important in your home than thanking your family for what they do for you. It is not customary in the U.S. to give expensive gifts or big parties to thank someone. Small things will make your family feel good: a smile, saying "Thanks, Mom," helping with chores, or being able to take care of yourself. Notice how often other host family members show appreciation and how they do it. It may be done very differently in your own country, but showing appreciation is always important.

Obey the rules. Many exchange students who come to the U.S. believe that families are very lenient and that students will be very independent here. Compared to your life at home, teenagers may or may not be more independent. But you should realize that all families have rules and regulations even though they may be different than your family's at home.

One family rule—called a "curfew"—is the time that teenagers must return home at night. This aspect of life in the U.S. may be different from what you are used to in your own country. But you will probably be expected to follow the same rules as other teenagers in your family. If there are no other teenagers in your home, your family will set rules similar to those of families with teenagers. Parents set curfews because they are concerned about the welfare of their children. If you are late, they will be worried about you and they might get upset and angry.

Depending upon the norms in your own family and culture, you may find the authority figures in the American family different than yours at home. In most American families both parents determine and enforce family rules. Women often have the most contact with the children, and their authority is respected. Accepting rules and direction from your host mother is very important. Some male students in the past have not done so and very serious problems between students and their host families have resulted.

Regardless of what you are accustomed to in your natural family, *you will be expected to follow the rules of your host family* when you live with them. If you do not obey, it insults them and shows a lack of respect. Breaking family rules usually results in punishment. For teens, this often means not being allowed to go out with their friends for one weekend or longer, and perhaps loss of the privilege to watch TV or use the phone for certain periods of time.

Look for the positive. You are not going to like everything about your new family. That is natural. No one is happy about everything that happens at home, such as what is expected of oneself, some of the rules, some of the food, or maybe the way one family member behaves. There are always pleasant and unpleasant aspects of family life. Your family may not like everything about you, either, but everyone needs to think about the positive and to respect others. Learn to just accept or ignore the things that bother you and concentrate on what you enjoy. Talk to your family and try to work out the difficulties.

Most students are able to work out the small difficulties they have adjusting to a new family and stay within the same host family throughout the exchange experience. Occasionally students change host families. Usually these are because of a change within the host family, such as a serious illness, change of job, or relocation to a different city. Sometimes students request to change families because they don't have their own room, want a bigger house or wealthier family, or want to live in a city rather than a rural area. These are not valid reasons for a change of family.

If you do have problems with your host family, it is best not to talk about it with other friends or exchange students. Discuss problems only with the family or your Placement Organization representative. Personal information told in public is called "gossip." Gossip hurts people's feelings and can be harmful to people's reputations.

Stay healthy. Staying in good health will help you enjoy your exchange experience. Exercise will help you stay healthy. Many Americans walk or run in their neighborhoods for exercise. Others join school or community sports teams or do aerobic and other physical activities with groups in the community.

Sleeping regularly is important to good health. You may need more sleep than you did at home. You will get tired from concentrating on so many new things and speaking a new language during the day.

Food and meals are important. You can be sure your host family will eat foods that are very different from back home. Meal times will probably also be different. No matter how you feel about what they eat and when, it is important that you taste everything and try to get used to American eating habits. Sometimes students become too concerned about food and think about food, eating, and gaining weight more than they need to. Talk to your host family or your Placement Organization representative if you are extremely worried about these things.

Tell your host family when you feel ill, and they will help you decide whether or not to see a doctor. If you have medicine from home that you should take, make sure your host family knows about it – whether it is prescription, over the counter, or herbal – so that they understand and can also help you make sure that it will not interact negatively with any other medicine you might need to take. Remember, no type of medicine or supplement is allowed onto school property unless approved by the school nurse and administrators.



Students make friends through a variety of activities, such as playing sports or musical instruments.

Meeting different people and making new friends will help you enjoy many aspects of American life.

Your Friends

When you come to the U.S. as an exchange student, you will be separated from your old friends. You will have the opportunity and the challenge to make new friends.

Friends at home. The roles of friends vary from one country to another. You may have friends now that you have had for many years. You may have had the same classmates ever since you began school. Perhaps your friends are very close to you; perhaps you have a few close friends and many acquaintances.

Friends in the U.S. You may find that friends in the U.S. are not so permanent. Many American families move from one place to another every few years. This means that new friends must be found. It also means that Americans need to be very friendly and outgoing, and they need to make an effort to find friends.

The same thing will happen to you. You will be new to your family, your school, and your community. Your host family may take you places and help you meet people. They may help you at school and in the neighborhood, or through groups to which they belong in the community, such as church groups. People join groups or clubs to make friends. You, too, will have to look for groups of people you like to find new friends.

At school, you will learn that students do not stay in the same class together all day. The students in one subject may not be in any other subject together during the day. Students make friends in clubs after school—sports clubs (although athletic eligibility or participation in school sports teams is not guaranteed and is subject to authorization by your local school district and the responsible State authority), hobby groups, drama and singing groups, etc. They also make friends through youth groups in the community and the church. This may be a new idea for you, but you will have to look for new ways to make friends while you are in the U.S.

Meet lots of people and make lots of friends. Having many friends is one way to learn and enjoy the many aspects of life in the United States. Depending upon your age and the students you are around, you may find some students have romantic relationships with each other. They may spend time only with each other; some may have sexual relations. Sometimes exchange students find one “special” girlfriend or boyfriend they have romantic feelings for. Being involved in a close relationship with one person limits your opportunities to meet and get to know other people. Most host families will not approve if you get involved in a sexual relationship, and many Placement Organizations have rules that prohibit such behavior.

You will find that many classmates participate in social activities in groups, not as couples. This is a better way to meet a variety of people. This also is a good way to observe how girls and boys interact. Behaviors that are acceptable in your home country may produce different, and perhaps unpleasant, responses in the U.S. Participate with groups of your peers and learn from them.

You should try to know many different people and spend your time with them, not only with other exchange students. You may be tempted to spend a lot of time with other exchange students or other foreigners because it seems easier to make friends with them. But the more time you spend with them, the less time you have to get to know the U.S. directly, through its own people, and the less likely American students will be to try to become friends with you.

Take the initiative to make friends. Say hello to people. Smile. Join in their activities. It will take some time, meeting lots of different people, perhaps, before you find a few close friends.

Your School

Going to school in the U.S. is a great opportunity to really understand teenagers in America. You also will have the chance to study new subjects, possibly in a very different way from the teaching styles you knew at home. You are expected to attend classes and complete all assignments, and to adjust to the differences you find.

Schools in the U.S. are the responsibility of state governments and local school districts. Therefore, there are **many** differences among schools in the U.S., including the number of students (from as few as 100 to as many as 3,000!), and the number and types of subjects taught.

Each school also has its own policies regarding exchange students. The school officials will determine to which grade level you will be assigned. Even if you are in the 12th year in an American school, the FLEX program cannot guarantee that you will receive an American high school “diploma” (the graduation document). Many schools will give only a “Certificate of Attendance” to exchange students.

Each school has the authority to determine your grade placement and to decide which type of document is awarded. Neither the FLEX program nor the Placement Organization can influence the school’s decisions. These will be based on individual school, state, or local policy. You and your natural parents must accept the school’s decision.

Although there are many differences, the following aspects of secondary schools tend to be the same throughout the U.S.

Types of courses. High schools in the U.S. offer many different courses for students. There are university preparatory courses that are academic and are required for students who want to continue their education. There are job-related courses including secretarial subjects, business classes, mechanical and other trade skills, and computer science. Students also attend classes they choose, called “electives.” These include subjects like music, drama, art, school government, and journalism.

Differences. You will find school in the U.S. very different from school in your country in several ways. One is that it offers such a variety of classes. You may find it more flexible because you probably will be allowed to choose some of your own classes. You also may feel that the school is less formal than your own because of different teaching styles and class schedules. Both teachers and students may dress less formally and in some cases teachers may allow students to call them by their first names. This does not mean they are not to be respected.

Students move from classroom to classroom throughout the day. They often stop at their lockers to change books. The time between classes is very short and you may have to learn to hurry from one class to the next. Being on time for the start of class is very important.

In some subjects there will be daily or weekly homework assignments. Work done outside the classroom is usually graded and will be considered in the final mark for the class.

In U.S. schools students are expected to do their own work, unless they are assigned a group project. If students study together or work on homework together, each must do his/her own paper. “Helping” someone else may be considered “cheating” (being dishonest) if one person does the work for the other. In such cases, neither student will receive grades for the work that was done, as punishment. Likewise, if students help each other on exams, or take notes into an exam, it is considered dishonest and students will be punished for it. Dishonesty, or “cheating,” is considered a serious offense, even resulting in expulsion from school.

During classes, students are not allowed to talk to each other while the teacher is speaking. It is considered rude to the person speaking. Expressing one’s opinions in class discussions is expected. Repeatedly challenging a teacher, however, is disrespectful and unacceptable. Differences of opinion are more appropriately handled in a “one to one” conversation with a teacher after class.

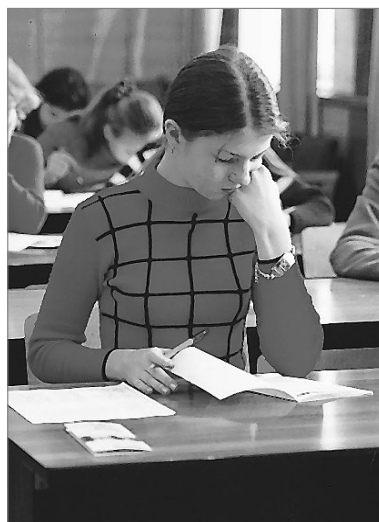
Because school is different does not mean it is “easier.” All students, whether or not they will continue on to university, have required subjects they must complete successfully to graduate from high school. American students who want to go to a university must not only take academic classes and receive high grades, they also must be active in school activities. Universities in the U.S. seek “well-rounded”

students—those who have good grades and also have been involved in many different activities. There are three criteria for admission to most universities: high grades in required academic courses, a high score on a national level scholastic aptitude examination, and active participation in the arts, sports, school government, or similar activities. Even though you will not be permitted to stay and go to a U.S. university, it is important for you to know how your American classmates prepare for university.

Your course schedule. As an exchange student, you will be required by your U.S. high school to take academic classes. They may be ones you do not have in your own school, such as U.S. history and government and American literature. You also will be expected to take math and science classes. Most exchange students also enjoy having the opportunity to take elective classes, such as cooking, computers, or mechanics.

You will not be able to take only academic classes or only electives. In the beginning, you may find some academic classes difficult because of your English but your effort should enable you to succeed. An all-elective schedule is not typical of the U.S. high school experience either. The exchange program wants you to have an authentic high school experience, which means taking both academic and non-academic courses.

School rules. U.S. high schools have “zero tolerance” policies towards violence and plagiarism. Any fighting or physical violence will be punished by suspension, expulsion, or possibly arrest. Plagiarism



During an exam, students must do their own work and not be involved with “cheating.”

is copying the work from someone else, either a classmate or from the internet. U.S. schools have strict rules that limit the use of cell phones on school grounds. Your school will provide you with a booklet describing their specific rules and policies; you should be familiar with their rules and take them very seriously.

Your Community

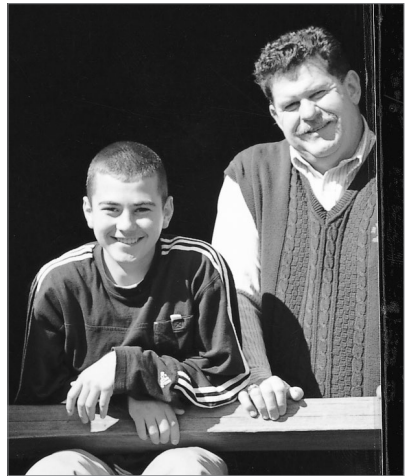
Get to know it. Before you feel at home in your community, you must know it. No matter how small the town is where you live, you should find all of the services you need. Walk around and discover your immediate neighborhood. Then, find out where things are in your community: the grocery store, the post office, the bank, the library, clothing stores, bus stop, etc.

If you live in a small town you may be able to walk to all of them. If you live in a suburb or in a rural area, you will need to go to the central area of your community by bus or car. When you get the opportunity, go with family or neighbors and begin to locate where the services are. You probably will feel much more at home once you are familiar with your community.

Getting settled and feeling comfortable will take time. Be patient. Be active. Accept advice and help from your family. Meet people. Begin to make friends. Soon you will start to feel at home in the United States.



You should get to know your new community and find out where things are located.



In time, you will become familiar with services and shopping in America.

CHAPTER 6:

Language Learning in the U.S.

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR ENGLISH BY:

- Taking advantage of daily language learning opportunities
- Finding and working with a language helper
- Just speaking and hearing it all day!

What can you do to feel at home in the U.S. as quickly as possible? Be able to speak English. When you can speak with people, you can get to know them. You can ask why they do things. You can explain how you do things differently. You can express your happiness, your frustrations. You can ask for help.

Some of you may need special help with your English. Based on your English test score, you may be nominated to participate in a Language Program. Your American Councils representative will inform you of this decision. The language training would take place in the U.S. before you begin the school year.

Many exchange students find that using English all the time is difficult and tiring. One student advises, *“Be really patient and strong even when you don’t understand English and feel bad. Try to participate in the conversation! Time passes very fast, so don’t waste any time.”*

You may be surprised when you arrive in the U.S. that your English is not as good as you thought it was. You may have studied English for several years in school. You may find it very easy to read and understand this book. Then why is it so difficult to understand people and to speak?

There are several reasons why this can happen. It is easier to learn to read, answer questions in a textbook, or memorize a dialogue than it is to talk with someone who uses words you do not understand and who speaks too fast! It is probably easier for you to understand people from your country who speak English as a second language rather than native English speakers. The problem may be that you have not spent time speaking English in the same everyday manner that you speak your own language. And using everyday language is a very different situation from being in a language class.

You also may be hearing “American English” for the first time. If you studied English with someone who speaks “British English,” you may find that some expressions, pronunciations, spellings, and sentence patterns are different in the U.S. Will learning American English ruin your British English? You will probably develop a different accent and change some of your expressions. But if you become fluent in American English, you can change the few expressions necessary to get along in your English classes when you return home. It is nothing to worry about.

You may find that you become very tired listening to English all of the time. This is normal. It happens because you have to listen very carefully in order to understand. You may need to rest, listen to some music, or read for a while to relax.

How You Can Help Yourself

You are in the perfect situation to learn English—you are surrounded by English speakers who probably do not speak your language. To take advantage of this situation, and be able to see your progress, you may want to make some plans for how you will learn. Here are some points to keep in mind:

1. Focus on everyday conversation. Learn first the things you need to understand and say in your home.
2. Listen to everything around you. Listen to radio and TV news and talk programs. Listen especially carefully when someone is speaking to you.
3. Ask people to “speak more slowly” or “repeat” what they have said if you do not understand. You will be surprised how fast you begin to recognize whole sentences and questions.
4. Repeat back what someone has told you to make sure you understand. This is especially important if you are expected to follow directions or be somewhere at a certain time.

5. Keep a list of expressions and words that are new and useful. Try to use them.
6. Download a translation app on your phone to use when you cannot remember a word or do not know one.
7. Record yourself while you talk with a family member or friends. Later, listen to the recording to hear how you might improve.
8. Read newspapers and magazines aloud to others or have them read to you—especially the comics.
9. Do not be shy about watching TV programs that teach young people English, such as “Sesame Street.” Young children will usually enjoy helping you practice conversation. Some TV game shows can help you with English, too, because they have questions and answers.
10. Relax, enjoy, and do not take yourself too seriously. Laugh at yourself and help people laugh with you when you make mistakes. Some of your embarrassing moments with English will be your funniest stories when you return home!



Be willing to laugh at yourself when you make mistakes. Do not take yourself too seriously.

Who Can Help You

You will find that many people around you will help. If you ask them, your family and friends will correct your English and help you say what you want to say. You may want to choose one special person—a “language helper”—who will help you regularly with your English. It could be a member of your family, a friend, or one of your teachers. Choose a person whom you like and respect. It must be someone who will correct you when you make an error and who will help you practice.



You will find many people, including all the members of your host family, to help you with your English.

What You Can Do With a Language Helper

First, your language helper needs to talk to you to find out how much you already know. Then together you should plan what you need to learn. It is best to learn the everyday sentences, questions, and answers that you need to use. Keep your lessons very simple. Follow these easy steps:

1. Tell your helper what you want to learn about—such as how to ask where something is or how to answer questions about liking or disliking something, such as a movie, or something about your U.S. high school.
2. Have your helper write down several sentences, including questions about that topic.
3. Listen as your helper says the dialogue or sentences.
4. Repeat what your helper has said.
5. Listen again.
6. Repeat again.
7. Try to use the sentences in a short conversation.
8. Write down, read, or record the sentences that your helper has written. Keep them to study on your own.

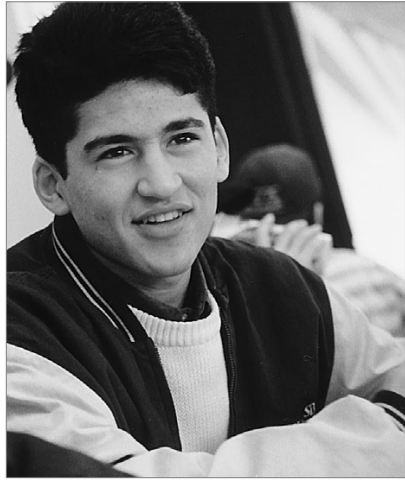
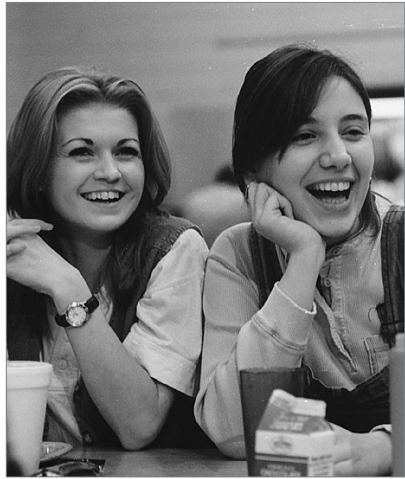
Remember that you want to learn the spoken language. The more often you practice listening and answering, the faster you will speak comfortably and fluently.

Have patience and do not be afraid to ask questions. You will hear many expressions and “slang” words that you do not know. Ask your friends or language helper what they mean and when and where you can say them. Some expressions are not appropriate for use at the dinner table!

Make time every day to practice your English. If your language helper is willing to help you every day, that would be wonderful. Maybe in exchange you can teach your helper your own language!

Good luck, have fun, and make friends learning English!





CHAPTER 7:

FLEX Program Policies

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN IMPORTANT RULES OF THE EXCHANGE PROGRAM, INCLUDING THOSE REGARDING:

- Use of alcohol
- Driving a car or other vehicle
- Traveling to other cities, states
- Shoplifting and other unlawful activities

The policies presented here are the general policies for students. Since variations regarding specific policies and procedures exist among Placement Organizations, it is important that you check with the representatives or office of your Placement Organization in the United States.

Every year a number of students are dismissed from the FLEX program and return to their home country without successfully completing their FLEX experience. Reasons have included violations of FLEX and/or Placement Organization policies such as poor grades or repeated failure to complete assignments or attend school; shoplifting or other violations of the law; physical violence at school or in the host home; inability to adjust to family or school; not following host family rules; and other unacceptable behavior.

Program Eligibility Requirements

Applicants will be considered to participate on this Program if:

1. The applicant meets the FLEX age and grade (class) requirements for their country; and
2. The applicant is a legal citizen of the country from which they apply.

As participants of an exchange program funded by the U.S. Government, FLEX students are subject to Department of State's Two-Year Home-Country Physical Presence requirement [212(E)], which stipulates that the student must reside in their home country for a minimum of two years

after completing their educational or cultural exchange program before they are eligible for immigrant or temporary worker status.

General Policies

INTERNET: Participants are required to follow all rules regarding use of computers, tablets, cell phones, and the Internet as determined by their Placement Organization, host family, and/or host school. Participants who place private (contact information, pictures, etc.) or other information on the Internet in violation of the rules established by their Placement Organization, host family, and/or host school may be dismissed from the Program. These Placement Organization rules are intended to protect students' safety. Students who in any way put the safety of themselves or others in jeopardy by misusing the Internet may be dismissed from the Program and may be subject to prosecution for any violation of law.

DANGEROUS/RISKY ACTIVITIES: Health benefit or insurance plans may consider certain activities risky and not cover treatment for injuries sustained while participating in them. Such activities may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- bungee jumping
- downhill skiing
- handling or using a firearm or other weapon
- horseback riding
- jet skiing
(operation or passenger of)
- motorcycle/motor scooter riding
(operation or passenger of)
- operation or passenger of an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) or motocross bike
- parachuting
- parasailing
- rock climbing (indoor/outdoor)
- scuba diving
- skateboarding
- snowboarding
- snowmobiling
(operation or passenger of)
- spelunking
- wakeboard riding
- water skiing
- windsurfing
- zip lining

Participants are not permitted to engage in any activities not covered by a health benefit plan or insurance. In addition, participants are not permitted to engage in any activities prohibited by their Placement Organization even if the activity is covered by insurance.

DRIVING MOTORIZED VEHICLES: Participants are not permitted to drive any motorized vehicle (such as a car, motorcycle, all-terrain vehicle, etc.) or pilot any aircraft under any circumstances while in the United States. Violators of this policy will be considered for Program

dismissal. Exceptions may be granted for farm equipment if allowed by the participant's Parent and Placement Organization. If authorized, the participant must observe precautions regarding safety and legal limitations.

EMPLOYMENT: The J-1 visa status permitting participants to stay in the United States restricts employment. Participants may not be employed on either a full or part-time basis but may accept informal employment such as babysitting or yard work.

MARRIAGE AND PREGNANCY: Participants who marry either while a participant or prior to the becoming a participant will be considered for dismissal from the Program. Participants who are discovered to be pregnant or to have caused a pregnancy must return home.

PARTICIPANT EXPENSES: The Program provides orientations, travel arrangements, host family and school placements, allowances, and insurance. In addition, the Program provides the Form DS-2019 required to apply for a J-1 visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate. The Program is not responsible for additional student expenses beyond the incidentals allowance, monthly pocket allowance, and official Program activities and travel. The host family is responsible for providing three meals a day for the participant and must provide either lunch money or a bag lunch. All other expenses, such as extra school fees or activities, social activities, personal and hygienic supplies, postage, and telephone calls, are paid by the participant using Program allowances.

Travel Policies

RETURN TO HOME COUNTRY AT THE END OF THE PROGRAM:

Participants must return home at the end of the Program on the date assigned by the Program Organization. Participants will not be allowed to remain in the United States after their assigned return-travel date. After which time, they will no longer be supported by the Program, will not have health benefits, and may be reported to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Changes to the assigned departure date will not be made to accommodate graduation, prom, or other special school or family events that occur after the assigned date.

STUDENT TRAVEL: Travel outside the host community during participation in the Program is not allowed, except in strict accordance with the following requirements:

- a. If a participant desires to travel outside the host community with and under the supervision of their host parent(s), school official, or other responsible adult, they must first obtain written approval from the Placement Organization.

- b. If a participant desires to travel outside the host community unaccompanied by their host parent(s), school official, or other responsible adult, they must first obtain written approval from the Placement Organization and the participant's parent or natural guardian. Some Placement Organizations may not allow such travel.
- c. Participant's safety must be assured to the greatest extent possible.
- d. The travel must not interfere with school attendance.
- e. International travel requires prior authorization by the U.S. Department of State, and the participant must have a multiple-entry U.S. visa.

NATURAL FAMILY VISITS: Many Placement Organizations limit, discourage, or do not allow visits with natural family members or friends from the home country even if they live in the United States. Such visits interrupt the continuity of the relationship with the host family and may diminish the exchange experience for the student and host family. Policies vary by Placement Organization. Participants must follow all Placement Organization's rules concerning visits.

VISITS TO THE HOME COUNTRY WHILE ON PROGRAM: Visits to participant's home country while on program is not allowed. Exceptions may be made in the case of the death or imminent death of an immediate family member (mother, father, brother, sister) contingent upon identification of funding to cover the costs and Program approval. An unauthorized visit will result in the participant's dismissal from the Program. Such non-emergency trips break the continuity of the relationship with the host family and may diminish the exchange experience for the student and host family. Any requests for exceptions must be presented to the Placement Organization and approved by the U.S. Department of State.

SCHOOL / HOST FAMILY PLACEMENT

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, PERFORMANCE, AND EXPULSION:

Participants must attend school and complete required coursework. Non-attendance may result in dismissal from the Program. Allowing for an initial period of adjustment, participants must achieve and maintain adequate academic results. After a reasonable period of time, poor motivation, under-achievement, or inappropriate behavior may be cause for dismissal from the Program. If a student is expelled from school, it will likely result in Program dismissal.

HOST FAMILIES: Students and Parents cannot choose their host family, school, grade placement, or location of placement. Placement

organizations will request agreement of the student and Parents if a student will be:

1. Placed in a home with another exchange student [a double placement];
2. Placed with a single host parent without children in the home; or
3. Enrolled in a school run by a religious organization.

Participants cannot be hosted by natural family members.

HEALTH/MEDICAL

MEDICAL TREATMENT OF A STUDENT (INCLUDING EMERGENCIES):

Before a participant arrives in the United States, the Program must receive written permission from Parents to obtain emergency medical attention if needed (see Permission for Care of My Child). Participants will receive medical attention in case of an accident or emergency. The insurance provider is determined by each Placement Organization. Each insurance provider has specific policies and restrictions governing the types of expenses it will reimburse. Placement Organizations, their representatives and host families are not responsible for any medical bills not covered by insurance regardless of who signs the hospital admission form. The Program is not responsible for any negative results because of medical treatment.

ILLEGAL ACTIVITY

Participants may be subject to prosecution by the U.S. legal system and may be dismissed from the Program if they engage in illegal activity, including but not limited to:

ALCOHOL: Participants are required to observe all U.S. laws with regard to the minimum drinking age in the United States, which is 21.

DRUGS: Participants are prohibited from selling, using, distributing, sharing, or possessing any drugs that are illegal under federal, state, or local law, including, but not limited to, marijuana and unauthorized use of prescription drugs. Any infraction is considered a grave violation of policy and may result in dismissal from the program.

SMOKING: There are strict laws restricting smoking in the United States. The legal age to buy tobacco in the United States is 21 years old. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), tobacco includes cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, hookah tobacco, cigars, pipe

tobacco, electronic nicotine delivery systems including e-cigarettes (vapes) and e-liquids.

THEFT/SHOPLIFTING

ANY OTHER ACTIVITY THAT IS AGAINST U.S. LAW or that results in the participant being arrested or charged with a crime.

LEGAL COUNSEL: Neither the Program Organizations nor the Department of State is obligated to provide legal counsel or defray representation expenses or fines of any sort should a Participant be charged with any crime or do something that attracts the attention of law enforcement officials. In such cases, the participant is subject to all local, state, and federal laws.

OTHER GROUNDS FOR TERMINATION

If a participant violates any provision of the Program application Parent-Student Agreement form, or if the participant does any of the following, then it may be determined that the participant has voluntarily withdrawn from the Program:

LEAVING THE PROGRAM EARLY: If a participant is absent without authorization from the host school or the place of residence designated by the Placement Organization without obtaining the advance written approval of the Program. The Program may determine that the student has left the Program through their own voluntary action. In this case, the Program is absolved from all obligations, legal or otherwise, to the student or their Parents for the student's current or future well-being. The Program will, if the circumstances warrant, work with the student to return to the Program. However, if this cannot be accomplished, a decision will be made that the separation from the Program is final, and the student will receive a letter from the Program sponsor indicating that the student has been reported to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database. The participant's medical insurance and health benefits will be canceled.

UNAUTHORIZED TRAVEL: If the participant travels without their Placement Organizations authorization.

MISREPRESENTATION: If the participant has misrepresented themselves in the Program application.

CHAPTER 8:

Hints for a Successful Exchange Experience

IN THIS CHAPTER FORMER EXCHANGE STUDENTS SHARE KEYS TO THEIR SUCCESS ON THE PROGRAM BY:

- Staying in regular, but not excessive contact with their natural family
- Adapting to personal appearance norms
- Avoiding politics
- Seeking ways to participate in some aspects of religious activities
- Respecting school and family rules
- Not spending all your time on your phone/electronic devices
- Being open to learning about new and different things

Communicating With Your Family Back Home

In this day and age it is easier than ever to stay in touch with people all over the world; connection with family and friends is immediate via messages, texts, or online calls. These technological advances have made staying in touch while you are away from home quick, easy, and less expensive. While it is important to let your family back home know how you are doing, you should be careful not to spend too much time on calling apps, email, or messaging them. If you do this all the time, your host family will think you are not interested in them, and you will miss out on getting a real American experience. Although messaging apps, email and other technology put your family and friends back home just a click away, try to use these things wisely, and remember, you are expected to follow your host family's rules regarding how much time you can spend on the computer and phone while you are in their home.



Personal Appearance and Grooming

You should be able to dress appropriately for most occasions by using the basic clothing list suggested from Chapter 3. If necessary, your incidentals allowance is available to help you purchase unexpected or essential clothing items that you may need but do not have. Be sure to check with your Placement Organization before making any purchases that you expect to pay for with your incidentals.

There will be times when jeans or shorts are not appropriate. Sometimes clothing and hair styles are ways that people express freedom and individuality, but students are expected to dress appropriately at home and at school. Many high schools do not allow students to wear clothing that exposes the body or undergarments; clothing showing profanity; or clothing advertising or depicting violence, weapons, alcohol, tobacco, drugs or nudity.

Political Expression

Views. The political views you express are only your own. You should tell this to people you meet who may think you represent your country officially. You are in no way an official representative of your country's government.

Representation. On the other hand, for many Americans, you may be the first or the only person from your country they have met. This means that your behavior will give people an impression of what your fellow citizens are like. The Program hopes that all exchange students are friendly and active, and that they will share some of their culture with their host community.

Involvement. As an exchange student, however, you should not become involved in the political activities of the United States, no matter how strongly you feel about an issue or a candidate. Your involvement may be misunderstood or present a safety issue.

Religion

Exchange students and their host families frequently have very different ideas about religion. For some families, religious services and the other activities offered by their places of worship are important to their weekly routine. For others, religion is not an important part of their lives.

The majority of Americans (70% according to 2014 Pew Research Center data) identify as Christians (mostly Protestant or Catholic). In addition, 1.9% are Jewish, .9% Muslim, .7% Hindu and .7% Buddhist. Others indicate that they identify with other faiths, and 22.8% are unaffiliated with any religion.

You are encouraged to join your family in all their activities, including religious services, unless your beliefs make it impossible. It is your choice, however, to attend or not to attend services.

Even if your own religious beliefs make it impossible for you to attend services with your host family, you may take advantage of the many other social activities offered by most U.S. churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques. You may find a much better opportunity for friendships and social activities than you expected. In many areas of the U.S., religious institutions are centers not only of religious life, but also of musical, recreational, and social life. Do not overlook the possibilities of sharing this part of your family's life.

On the other hand, your host family may not attend religious services, or may attend different ones than you would prefer. You may ask



In many areas of the United States, religious institutions are centers of musical and social life.

your host family to help you find a place of worship of your own denomination, if they do not attend and you wish to do so. It is possible, however, that in some parts of the U.S. you may not find the place of worship of your choice.

Both host families and students must respect each others' rights to their own beliefs and must not try to influence or convert them. If you have any concerns about this issue, talk to your host family and also with your Placement Organization representative.

Smoking

In most U.S. states purchasing cigarettes and smoking is illegal for anyone under the age of 21. Failure to abide by state laws can cause problems for students and host families and may be cause for Program dismissal.

In general, smoking is less and less acceptable in the U.S. and is often a topic of discussion among friends. It is not permitted on airplanes, government buildings and most private offices. If it is permitted at all, it will be only in specific, designated areas.

Sometimes students do not say on their applications that they smoke because they fear they will not be selected for the program,

or because they begin smoking after applying for the program. It is important to be honest if you do smoke.

Don't forget that you signed a statement in your application which says "I understand that there are laws restricting smoking in my host state and host school, and that my host family may have objections to smoking in their home. I agree to honor these laws and/or restrictions." Exchange students are not permitted to smoke during their program year.

Screen Time

Messaging apps make it easy to stay connected to home. Student are expected to follow their host family's screen time rules. Sometimes this includes all children in the family to leave their electronic devices in a common room at night.

CHAPTER 9:

When You Need Some Help

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN THE TYPE OF HELP EACH OF THESE CAN PROVIDE:

- Your host family
- Your Placement Organization

All students face some adjustment problems. This is normal and nothing to worry about. If you need help while you are an exchange student, you will have people to aid you. Simply ask for help.

Many people will be there to help you. Your host family, your friends, your Placement Organization representative and your embassy or consulate can all be of some help.

If a situation is uncomfortable, do not be afraid to discuss it with your family or to contact your Placement Organization. For more serious problems, remember that you have legal rights while you are in the U.S. A crime is a crime anywhere. If you are the victim of a crime, tell your host family and Placement Organization about it.

Your Host Family

You and your host family should be able to solve most problems that come up. You are a member of the family and, just like at home, the family is your main source of help. You can trust your host parents, talk to them, and confide in them if you have problems. They cannot help you if they do not know that something is wrong.



If you need help or have a problem while you are an exchange student, let your host family or Placement Organization know. They cannot help you if they do not know something is wrong.

Your family is willing to make adjustments to help you feel more comfortable. But you also must adjust and try to live as they do while you are in the U.S. As you have read, it will not always be easy, but it is possible. Let your family help you through the hard times. Trust them.

If you have problems with your host family and have tried to work them out but cannot, let your Placement Organization know—ask for help.

Your Placement Organization

Your Placement Organization is responsible for the selection of your host family. The Placement Organization will tell you whom to contact in case you have questions or have problems that you and your host family cannot resolve. The Placement Organization also will help you in case of emergencies.

When you receive information about your Placement Organization from your American Councils representative, write the information on the next page.

If you don't receive your representative's name and phone number at that time, you can fill it in later.

Placement Organization: _____

Address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Your representative's name: _____

Representative's telephone number: _____

Your Embassy or Consulate in the U.S.

Your home country's embassy or consulate can help you with certain administrative questions, if needed. If you think you need help from your embassy, contact your Placement Organization first. There are many things your embassy cannot do, such as exchange money, arrange for free medical or legal assistance, or make travel arrangements.



CHAPTER 10:

The Future Years

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL EXPLORE:

- What you can expect to learn from the exchange program
- How to prepare to go home again

Your Learning—What to Expect

Exchange students learn a great deal from their experience of living with a new family in a different culture. Some of the learning is personal growth in maturity and the ability to think for themselves. Some of the learning is awareness and understanding of the world.

You are taking a big step by becoming an exchange student. You are leaving familiar places and people. You are going to find out that you have the ability to get along in a foreign country, in a different language, with a family and lifestyle very different from your own. You are going to learn not only how to take care of yourself, but also that there are other kinds of people and other ways of living. You may find new ways to make friends and do things and develop new ways of expressing yourself. You are going to share yourself and your country with people who may never have known anyone from your country.

As a result of your exchange experience, you may become more proud to be a citizen of your own country. You will be able to explain the strengths and weaknesses of your own country and those that you experienced in the U.S. You will be able to think of beliefs and attitudes as “different” rather than “right” or “wrong.” You probably



You may find it difficult to leave your host family when it is time to return to your own country at the end of the Program.

will make some good friends in the U.S. You may become interested in a profession that has an international focus. You will very likely develop a strong interest in what is happening in the world and will want to contribute to a better understanding among countries.

Returning Home: Some Reentry Thoughts

Returning home after a period in another country is sometimes called “reentry.” It means you will be re-entering (or entering again) into your own culture. Because you will learn and change so much during your exchange experience, you may find it difficult to adjust to your own country again when you go home.

You may think that nothing has happened at home in your absence. That will not be true, of course. But you are the one who has had an experience that is so different. You may find it difficult to express how deeply you feel about your host family and friends, what wonderful times you had, and how much you liked certain aspects of American culture. Your family and friends may think you are boasting or that you feel superior. These are common reactions when exchange students return home.

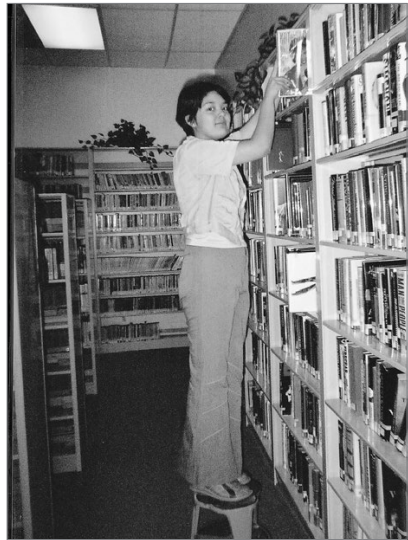
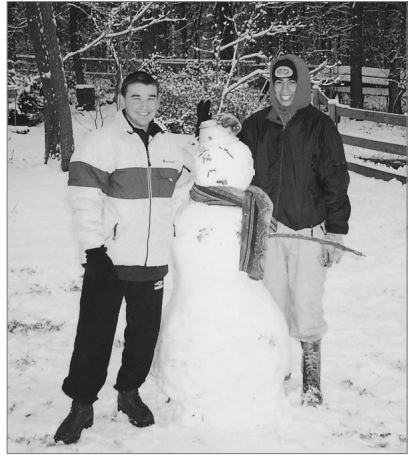
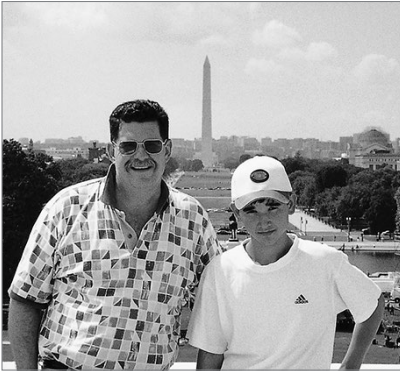
In addition, separation from your host family may be difficult. You may want to plan to keep in touch with them in the future.

Your Placement Organization will provide information about reentry before you return home. It is important to remember that problems of re-adjustment to one's own country are common. They are nothing to worry about, but it is better to be prepared than to be surprised. Re-adjustment, too, is a part of the exchange experience and a part of your growth and learning. It is the beginning of the opportunity to put your experience to positive use in your home country, and towards mutual respect and world peace.

Your Continuing Relationship With The FLEX Program

FLEX alumni events are devoted to community service, opportunities for professional development and English language/American cultural activities. FLEX alumni in the past have engaged in clothing and food drives, helped to clean parks and neighborhoods, and worked with orphans, disabled children, and others in need. Alumni fine-tune their English public speaking skills through debate tournaments and model UN forums. They have helped to monitor national elections. Alumni often participate in computer and Internet training and professional skill development training on topics such as "conducting a job search" or "how to write a resume." Social activities range from movie nights to picnics and holiday celebrations. In short, alumni activities are designed by FLEX alumni, for FLEX alumni. They give participants the chance to help themselves and their communities, as well as provide them the opportunity to socialize with other alumni and Americans.

You can learn more about alumni activities, alumni news, and publications at [**www.bradleyherald.org**](http://www.bradleyherald.org), [**www.facebook.com/flexalumni**](https://www.facebook.com/flexalumni), and [**@FLEXAlumni**](https://twitter.com/FLEXAlumni) on Twitter (now "X").



You may want to make plans to stay in touch with your host family and friends you have made during your stay in the U.S.

CHAPTER 11:

Conclusion

You have read about many things in this handbook: What being an exchange student means, what things to do to prepare for your year in the U.S., and how life in your host family and American school may be different from your own.

Please read this handbook again, and discuss it with your parents. Make sure you complete all of the items on the checklist (see pages 29-30) before leaving home. Be sure both you and your parents understand what your incidentals and monthly allowances are to be used for. And, re-read the Program policies.

We hope you find this handbook informative as you prepare to leave and useful once you are in the U.S. Please bring it with you to the U.S. You will use this handbook during your orientation classes and throughout your exchange.



Best wishes for your exchange year!



GLOSSARY

The following terms have special meanings in relation to the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program. Most are explained more fully in the text of this handbook.

allowance A set amount of money. Two types of allowances are provided by the Program:

Incidentals allowance - one time allowance of up to U.S.\$300 available to the host family to pay for initial costs for starting the school year.

Monthly allowance - U.S. \$200 provided monthly to pay for personal expenses, such as personal items, telephone calls, and social activities.

alum or alumni a student or students who have completed the program.

American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS U.S. organization with responsibility for recruitment and selection of students, pre-departure orientation, travel, local support to natural parents during the Program year, and alumni programming. Also one of the placement organizations in the U.S.

application The process of completing the forms (writing essays, providing health and school records, etc.) that allow a student to be considered by the selection committee for the FLEX program.

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) A bureau of the United States Department of State that administers U.S. Government-funded exchange programs. These programs serve the greater interest of U.S. foreign policy with a goal of mutual understanding between the U.S. and other countries.

culture In relation to the FLEX program, culture is used to mean the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that a group of people have in common. (It is not used in the sense of fine arts: painting, music, sculpture.)

culture shock A reaction to living in a country different from one's own.

DS-2019	This is a document issued by the program sponsor, in this case the U.S. Department of State, certifying that your admission into a program has been accepted and that you are eligible to apply for a J-1 visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. It also shows the dates during which you may legally stay in the United States.
exchange student	A term used to refer to a student from one country attending school in another country. It does not literally mean one student changing places with another within a family and school.
Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX)	Originally passed by the U.S. Congress in 1992 as part of the FREEDOM Support Act (FSA), the FLEX program extends a hand of friendship from the people of the United States of America to the people of Eurasia (countries of the former Soviet Union), and has since expanded to include other countries in Europe. The FSA Secondary School Program established the first large exchange program for Eurasia and U.S. secondary School students to travel to and live in each other's countries.
host family	A family who welcomes an exchange student to live with them as a family member during the exchange period.
local representative	Each student will have a local representative from their Placement Organization who will assist them as necessary, and provide periodic educational and social activities for the exchange students within a geographical area.
natural family	the student's biological parents or legal guardians.
orientation	Information provided prior to the Program to help prepare for the experience. Orientation materials for the Academic Year Program include this handbook, the Natural Parent Information Guide, and material on the U.S. which you will receive from the U.S. Embassy in your country. An orientation program will be provided before departure for the U.S. The orientation program will consist of classes about the United States and its culture, schools, and family lifestyles.
passport	A legal document provided by one's own government that contains one's age, date and place of birth, and nationality. Some countries have national passports. An international passport is needed to travel to most countries outside of one's own.

Placement Organization	Private, not-for-profit, educational organizations that help FLEX Academic Year students to study and live with host families in the U.S. They select host families and provide local representatives who assist students and host families and conduct educational programs and activities.
reentry	The process of returning to one's own country and culture. Just as a student needs time to adjust to a foreign culture, so will they need some time to get accustomed to being home again.
recruitment	The process of learning about the FLEX Program from one of its representatives, taking an English test, and deciding to apply for the program, if qualified.
selection	The process of reading all of the student applications and determining which students will be finalists and alternates. This process takes place in the United States and is done by experienced evaluators. This process is merit-based, as the selectors have no connection with any government or any of the students.
states	The 50 geographical areas that together form the United States of America. In addition to the national U.S. government and laws, each state has its own government and specific laws, and authority to create certain institutions (such as schools). Local rights are guaranteed to the states by the Constitution of the United States.
U.S., USA	Abbreviations for United States, or United States of America. These can be used interchangeably.
United States Department of State	The federal foreign affairs agency of which the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) is a part. See Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs above.
visa	A stamp or sticker put into a passport by the Consulate of a foreign government. It permits the holder to request entry into that country. FLEX students are given a "J-1" visa that allows them to study in the U.S., but not to work. The J-1 visa will show the date by which the student may request entry into the U.S.
volunteer	A person who works without receiving pay. Some of the Placement Organization representatives and all of the host families are volunteers.

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