

# HOST FAMILY HANDBOOK

The world is in your hands..."



[www.StudentAmericanInternational.com](http://www.StudentAmericanInternational.com)

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**Your Local Representative is:**

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**Your Local Representative's phone number is:**

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**Your Local Representative's email address is:**

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**Your Regional Director's name and contact info is:**

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**Department of State contact info:**

USDOS Contact: Toll Free 1.866.283.9090 Email: [jvisas@state.gov](mailto:jvisas@state.gov)

## Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	i
<b>Welcome Letter</b> .....	1
<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>SAI Organization Organizational Structure</b> .....	2
<b>Chain of Communication</b> .....	3
<b>How Can I see my Students Information?</b> .....	3
<b>USDOS Required Second In Home Walk Through</b> .....	3
<b>Supervision &amp; Monthly Reports</b> .....	3
<b>24/7 Support</b> .....	4
<b>Emergency Procedures</b> .....	4
<b>They Don't Know Unless You Tell Them</b> .....	5
<b>Within One Week, Sit Down With Your Student</b> .....	5
<b>Accidents/Natural Disasters</b> .....	5
<b>Insurance</b> .....	6
<b>Program Rules</b> .....	6
<b>Host Family Rules</b> .....	7
<b>Illegal Drugs (including marijuana)</b> .....	7
<b>Alcoholic Beverages</b> .....	7
<b>Smoking</b> .....	8
<b>Driving Motor Vehicles</b> .....	8
<b>Life Changes</b> .....	8
<b>Local, State and Federal Laws</b> .....	9
<b>Travel - within the US</b> .....	9
<b>Travel -Travel Outside the US with your Student</b> .....	9
<b>High School Code of Conduct and Student Guidelines</b> .....	10
<b>School Attendance and Grades</b> .....	10
<b>Visits of Natural Parents/Friends/Relatives and Students Temporary Home Return.</b> .....	11
<b>Employment</b> .....	11
<b>Change of Medical Status</b> .....	11
<b>Change of Host Families</b> .....	12
<b>Proper Clothing</b> .....	12

<b>Host Family Responsibility .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Student’s Arrival.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Room &amp; Board – Not a Bed &amp; Breakfast .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Emotional Support.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Assistance With School Registration.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Reasonable Transportation.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Communication and Conflict Resolution.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Safety of Students.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Guidelines for Showing Affection.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Guidelines for Preventing Seductive Behavior.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Adjustment Issues .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Try to Limit Contact With Family And Friends for a While .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>English Only In America.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Culture Shock.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Loss Of Freedom.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Homesickness.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Firearms.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Money.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>High School.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Vacations.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>U. S. Department of State Requirements.....</b>	<b>25</b>

## Welcome Letter

*Dear American Host Family:*

*On behalf of the U.S. Department of State, I welcome your decision to host a secondary school student. The secondary school student program is one of many ways foreign nationals participate in people-to-people exchange programs in the United States. People-to-people exchanges are a valuable tool of foreign policy. The secondary school student program offers a unique opportunity for you to experience firsthand the richness and diversity of a culture different from your own, and for you to exemplify American values and culture to a foreign visitor. Through this program, you will join thousands of American families who serve as citizen ambassadors of the United States. Many families have found the secondary school student program to be a rewarding and enjoyable experience.*

*High School programs have been a part of U.S. public diplomacy efforts since 1949. Approximately 25,000 high school students from around the world participate in this program each year. The good will of American host families in opening their homes to these young international visitors is vital to this program's success.*

*The health, safety, and well-being of the young people who participate in this program are our highest priority. A host family has many responsibilities, the most important of which is properly caring for an international student during the course of his/her program. The student is a guest in your home and in our country and you may be the first "real Americans" this young person meets. How you relate with this student will create a lasting image of our country and its people.*

*The regulations governing the secondary school student program are found at eCFR — Exchange Visitor Program regulations (22 CFR 62 - Exchange Visitor Program). These regulations address the most frequently asked questions about the program and provide the rules under which the program operates. It is extremely important that you notify your sponsoring organization if you have any concerns or if the student's personal health, safety or well-being is threatened in any way. If the sponsoring organization is not responsive to your concerns, you should contact the Department of State directly through our J-1 Visa Emergency Helpline (1-866-283-9090), which is also available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or by e-mail at [JVisas@state.gov](mailto:JVisas@state.gov).*

*The secondary school student program offers you, your family, your exchange student, your local school and community the opportunity to create a strong lifelong relationship. I hope this will be a positive and rewarding experience for all of you. The Department of State is deeply appreciative of your part in ensuring the program reaches its maximum potential as a quality educational and cultural exchange experience.*

*Sincerely,*

*G.K. Saba  
Director, Policy & Program Support  
for Private Sector Exchange*

## **Introduction**

Student American International (SAI) is a Connecticut based, not-for-profit student exchange organization. An SAI student comes to the United States to live with an American family and attend an American high school, experiencing American life first hand. Every student selected to participate in this program has been personally screened by our overseas partners. In addition, our Program Director examines each prospective student's application before any student is accepted for placement by SAI. In order to qualify for SAI placement, a student must meet certain standards for academic and personal achievement, as well as meet proficiency requirements for both speaking and writing English.

The desire of international students to experience American culture and life could not be fulfilled without the cooperation of public high schools, host families, and a field organization to support both. Local high schools may choose to accept international students, or not. Since the cost of these students is paid by local taxpayers, school boards must see a benefit to the student population in order to assume this expense. The primary benefit to high schools is to increase the diversity of their student population, and to expose their students to other cultures, in hopes of teaching them tolerance of other cultures. As you know, our host families do not receive compensation (a visa requirement), so they also have nonfinancial reasons for hosting an international student. Their reasons for hosting are similar to high schools' reasons. Most families are interested in learning about other cultures, exposing their children to other cultures, and forming a lasting relationship with a child from another country. Our field organization is trained to support the needs of our exchange students, but also to support the needs of the school and our host families. SAI is committed to making the exchange experience rewarding to all parties – the student, school personnel, and our host families.

SAI complies with all U. S. Department of State requirements, as well as their suggested guidelines. At the end of this section, you will find the U. S. Department of State requirements which govern organizations handling exchange students. We also, voluntarily, honor the national standards established by CSIET. CSIET is The Council on Standards for International Educational Travel. It is a private, not-for-profit organization whose mission is to identify reputable international youth exchange programs. We are proud to say that we are on their Advisory List, which means that they have evaluated our program and determined that we meet their national standards.

We have tried to make this handbook as useful for you as possible. The content was developed based on the real experiences of thousands of students, as well as their schools and host families. No matter how much material we have incorporated in the handbook, nothing can replace regular and open communication with your SAI Local Contact (LC).

## **SAI Organization Organizational Structure**

As you now know, Student American International (SAI) is a Connecticut based not-for-profit student exchange organization. We have a board of directors, where we receive oversight and direction. All operational decisions are made by our CEO, Melissa Polos, who also sits on our board. Melissa has over twenty years of experience with international students. She has acted in every capacity within our organization, including being a host parent. Our national office is located

in Myrtle Beach, SC, where Melissa is assisted by a well-trained staff. Anthony Taylor, veteran, has 10 years' experience working as an SAI administrator. He is the first point of contact at SAI headquarters. Anthony is dedicated to assisting all your needs. SAI's field organization consists of both Regional Directors (in our larger territories) and Local Contacts, hereinafter referred to as LCs. These are the individuals who you will deal with far more often than the national staff.

### **Chain of Communication**

If you have a problem, or simply want to ask a question, your first point of contact is your LC. In all likelihood, you have already developed a relationship with this individual through the student selection and placement process. If at some point, you have a problem, and are unable to resolve it with your LC, or he/she is unavailable, your next point of contact would be your Regional Director or State Manager. If you are still unable to resolve the problem, you should contact the national office, and you will be directed to the appropriate individual to assist you. If you are located in one of our territories where there is no Regional Director or State Manager, then your next level of contact would be directly to the national office, and you will be directed to the appropriate individual to assist you.

### **How Can I see my Students Information?**

You can access a copy of your student's application through our online system where you completed your host family application. Log into zapp and click on the "students you are hosting" tab. On this application you will find a terms and agreements page which includes a medical waiver form signed by your student's natural parents giving you permission to seek medical treatment for your student. Please locate this information and be prepared to offer it in a doctors' offices as needed. SAI maintains legal guardianship of all participants.

### **USDOS Required Second In Home Walk Through**

Within 60 days of your student's arrival, another person associated with SAI will make arrangements to come to your home. The purpose of this visit is to confirm that the information sent to the student and their parents prior to the students arrival, is what was stated on your application. *(There have been several instances with other organizations sending placement information that proved to be untruthful and students really did not have a home)*. This person will come in, take required photos, check for power, running water and other simple criteria. Visits typically do not take longer than 10 minutes. The only bedroom that needs to be confirmed is your student's bedroom. All other bedrooms are considered private and your visiting person should not ask for access to any other bedrooms. Required photos are to confirm the same areas that were required in your host family application. All family members are not required to be present in the home, it is a simple walk through process and only one person, preferably an adult, needs to be present.

### **Supervision & Monthly Reports**

The Department of State requires our LCs to meet with you, email you/ text you, Facebook or call you on the telephone, at least once each month. They will also contact the school that your student attends, and the student. The purpose for this contact is to secure feedback from the student on

how he/she is doing, not only from his/her perspective, but from the perspective of the host family and school personnel. The LC will use the information obtained from all sources to file a Monthly Supervision Report to the national office and overseas partners, who in turn provide the natural parents with a report on how their child is doing. They will also meet in person with you once per semester.

We are not in the business of parenting our host parents. We chose you because we felt you were capable of parenting an exchange student. If the student, host family, or school personnel identify a problem, the LC will determine what action needs to be taken. Minor problems may be dealt with during the monthly contact phone call or meeting. Other problems may require further conversations with the involved parties, and more detailed documentation than a Monthly Supervision Report. This is called an Incident Report.

There are several levels of discipline for our students, which may result from either behavioral or academic issues. The first level is simply a discussion of the issue between you, the LC and the student. The next levels generally result in an Incident Report. Depending on the severity of the problem, and if the problem has been ongoing, the student may receive a verbal warning, a written warning, a probationary letter, or may be dismissed from the program for repeated violations. Major violations could result in immediate dismissal.

Hopefully, if you have an issue or problem with your student, you will not wait until your LC person does his/her monthly check-in. Problems are far more easily controlled when they are dealt with as soon as they arise. Remember, you are their parent now so say it like it is. It is their responsibility to adjust to your family, not the other way around. For larger issues, we often hear from our families that they don't want to get the student in trouble. The fact is, it is far more likely that the student will end up in trouble if an issue is not dealt with when it first occurs, and is allowed to continue until it becomes a big problem! Please don't fall into this trap. Your LC is there to help you – call if you need help! If your program is going well, you will likely only hear from your LC once per month yet they are always available for support any time in between. For non-emergency issues, please allow at least 48 hours before receiving a response from your LC.

## **24/7 Support**

Our normal National Office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. EST. Emergency support is available to our students and families on a 24 hour a day basis, 365 days a year. If you have an emergency, and your LC is unavailable, call our emergency telephone number, which is 1-800-639-0564. You will be prompted as to how to receive personal support for your emergency. Be sure to have a pen and paper to note emergency contact information.

## **Emergency Procedures**

Generally, emergencies fall into the category of medical issues. First and foremost, use your judgment. SAI needs to be contacted, as does the medical insurance carrier, but the well-being of the student comes first. If the student becomes seriously ill, or injured, and requires immediate medical care, by all means get the student to the emergency room. Be sure and take the student's medical history and medical release (both included in the student's application), and be sure that the student has their medical insurance card on them at all times. Once you are at the emergency

room, telephone your LC first, and if he/she is unavailable, contact the Regional Director. If you are unable to reach either of these individuals, or do not have a Regional Director and can't reach your LC, then call the national office staff at the emergency number – 1-800-639-0564. It is imperative that you keep SAI informed of all emergency medical procedures and the status of the student's health, so that we can keep the natural family advised of their child's medical status.

We can never anticipate all of the situations which may arise. If you are faced with a non-medical emergency, get in touch with your LC, Regional Director, State Manager or the national office staff for guidance. It is not our intent to scare you, but other types of emergencies may include a sexual assault, death of a family member of your student, arrest of your student, or some other unfortunate situation. The likelihood that this will happen is very remote. We are here to assist you no matter what you are faced with.

### **They Don't Know Unless You Tell Them**

You were selected to host because SAI felt your home would provide a warm nurturing environment that a normal teenager would thrive in with the proper direction from you and your family. Your student will not know the rules, what to do, and what not to do unless you tell them. If you have an issue with your student, tell them first at the time of occurrence. Remember, *you are their parent now*. Often times, host families feel compelled to contact their LC for general issues when in fact telling your student outright will solve the problem. This will help to build your relationship with your student. Hearing it straight from you makes them feel like part of the family versus having your coordinator address it with the student separately, which is seen as micromanaging. This could cause the student to feel like an outsider. Remember, they are to be part of your family and adjust to your home environment. You set the rules and guidelines like you do with your own family members and you enforce them.

### **Within One Week, Sit Down With Your Student**

Within a week of your student's arrival sit down with them and ask them to write out their expectations of their program. Be sure they do not list improving their English or travel. This is a given by most all students. Have them clearly state what they want to get out of this program and what they are willing to do to get this. This is an important part of holding students accountable for meeting their goals and expectations as well as keeping them in check of what the program is really about. This is a cross cultural academic program, not a wealthy program, not a travel program.

### **Accidents/Natural Disasters**

Sometimes things happen unexpectedly. An accident or Mother Nature can cause disruption during your program. Your LC, our offices and overseas partners will be concerned until we hear from you or your student. Should you be faced with an incident such as a tornado, fire, accident or any other unforeseen event, please follow this simple checklist so all parties can be informed, assist you where possible and notify your agent and natural parents.

\*Be sure your student always carry their ID card and insurance card issued by their agent. This contains crucial information about who they are, where they are staying, for example.

\*Notify your LC immediately of your situation. Be prepared to tell them who, what, how, when and why and where. If your LC is not available, please contact your Regional or Area Manager or someone in this office. Our emergency line is [800-639-0564](tel:800-639-0564). Be sure to have pen and paper when calling our emergency line as you will be given instructions to receive prompt assistance.

\*Provide any documentation or photos when available.

## **Insurance**

*Please follow these steps when dealing with insurance!*

U. S. Department of State regulations require that every SAI student is covered by medical insurance, and they are. Your student has received an insurance information card which he/she should carry with him/her at all times. They will also be given sample claim forms along with a brochure of who to contact and when. **You are not responsible for your student's medical expenses, his/her natural parents are. Do not be persuaded by a doctor's office or hospital's request for you to sign as the guarantor of payment.**

SAI insurance covers emergency illness or injury sustained during the exchange period. Whenever your student requires medical attention, you will need the same three documents with you that we referred to above in emergency procedures – the student's medical history, the medical release form (both included in the student's application), and the student's insurance information. Please notify your LC if your student needs to receive emergency medical care.

All insurance policies exclude some services. Routine physical examinations (as for sports), vaccinations which the student should have received prior to coming to the United States, and dental care are NOT covered. However, dental emergencies, such as dental treatment related to an accident, may be covered. Just because a claim has been filed does not mean it will be covered. Be sure Doctors obtain proper authorizations before any major procedure.

If you would like additional information regarding the insurance program that SAI subscribes to for our students, please visit our website at [www.studentamericaninternational.com](http://www.studentamericaninternational.com). You will find a link for "insurance" on the menu. Simply click on the link and it will take you to the insurance carrier's information. Students insurance will only cover what is considered a reasonable charge for the services provided. This will vary according to what state you are residing in. Student and their natural parents will be responsible for balances due not covered by insurance. All deductibles must be paid at time of service. Your student has been provided the exact same information noted above about insurance.

## **Program Rules**

SAI has Program Rules which our students must comply with. As part of their application process, and before the student left his/her native country, the student (and his/her natural parents) agreed by their signatures to accept the SAI Program Rules. These rules are covered in detail at the Student

Orientation Meeting, and should have been covered at your Host Family Orientation Meeting. If you, or your student, have questions regarding any SAI rule, discuss them with your LC.

### **Host Family Rules**

The host family establishes household rules including chores, curfew hour, as well as telephone and internet use. It is the responsibility of the student to follow all rules established by the host family. If the student has issues regarding the host family's rules, he/she should discuss them with the host family. If the issues can't be resolved between the student and the host family, either the student and/or the host family should contact their SAI LC for resolution.

It is extremely important to treat your student as a member of the family. All too often, the host family "feels sorry" for the student, and is afraid to be strict or discipline the student, or give them chores. Remember, the student will be with you for months, and if you treat them as a guest, the student will wear out his/her welcome very quickly. As a family, you are entitled to have household rules specific to your home and routine. Don't feel "badly" or "guilty" because your student doesn't like the rules – be firm!

SAI recommends limiting international phone calls and internet usage to/from family/friends in their natural country to no more than one call / internet use per week during the first two or three weeks of arrival, and one or two calls per month following that. SAI recommends host family to password protect their internet in order to monitor student use. Keep in mind your neighbors may have open Wi-Fi that a student can access. Skype calls should not exceed a half an hour each. Students who make or receive frequent international phone calls and spend excessive time on the internet do not adjust well to their American environment.

### **Illegal Drugs (including marijuana)**

Use (or possession) of illegal drugs will not be tolerated. Any possession or proven use of illegal drugs will result in immediate termination from the program and return home. If SAI has sufficient evidence that a student is using illegal drugs, the student may be required to submit to a drug test. If you suspect that your student may be taking illegal drugs, or prescription medication not prescribed to them, contact your LC immediately. This is not a situation that you want to deal with, unless you have first received guidance from your LC on how SAI wishes to proceed.

Also, advise your student that if he/she finds himself/herself in a situation where there is illegal drug use, they should call you immediately to be removed from the situation. If they do not immediately remove themselves from the situation, they could face disciplinary action, since they will be perceived by SAI as willingly being in an at-risk social situation.

### **Alcoholic Beverages**

The purchase and/or consumption of alcoholic beverages by anyone under the age of 21 is a violation of United States law, and grounds for immediate termination from the program. The United States is very conservative in their drinking laws compared with other countries. Most countries that our students come from have a legal drinking age of 16. As a result, many of our students have been drinking and going to night clubs since they turned 16 years old. Our students

are not allowed to be anywhere out of their host family home where there is drinking of alcohol. As with drug use, if the student finds themselves at a party or function where alcoholic drinking occurs, they must remove themselves from the situation immediately! Picture this . . . your student asks to go to a party, you agree, there is drinking, and the party is raided by the police. You receive a call that your student has been arrested, and that you need to come to the police station. This is a situation that you do NOT want to be faced with. This is a particular problem for students who are seniors – the party after the prom, the beach the next day, etc. – do your homework and make sure that all functions are alcohol free!

### **Smoking**

State laws restrict the purchase and use of cigarettes to at least age 18. Also, smoking is considered culturally unacceptable by most host parents. Therefore, SAI has a strict no-smoking rule for their students. Disciplinary action will be taken against any student found with cigarettes in their possession, or smoking. This is another area where the United States is more conservative than other countries. Laws regulating the age of smoking are not common in our students' native countries. Unfortunately, some of our students have been smoking for several years before coming to America. Under no circumstances are they allowed to smoke. And, don't fall for the line . . . "but they aren't mine – I'm just holding them for a friend." Call your LC immediately to determine how he/she wants to handle the situation.

### **Driving Motor Vehicles**

Students (including those who have a driver's license) are not allowed to drive any motor vehicle for the duration of their SAI Program. There is one exception to this rule. Students enrolled in an accredited Driver Education Program, may drive only the vehicle(s) owned by the Driver Education Program. They may not drive 4 wheelers, mopeds, snowmobiles or any motor vehicle. Our students are NOT, under any circumstances, to drive a vehicle other than one owned by a Driver's Education Program. This means at ANY time – not in a parking lot, not in the host family driveway, nowhere, ever! In most states, the student cannot meet the requirements of obtaining a driver's license, so signing up for a Driver's Education Program is pointless. There may be residence requirements, and required hours behind the wheel which cannot be met through driving a vehicle owned by the Driver Education Program. Most importantly, your insurance will not cover accident or injury related to an exchange student driver.

### **Life Changes**

No "life changes" are allowed while the student is in the United States under the SAI Program. This includes, but is not limited to: changing religion, getting married, becoming pregnant, causing a pregnancy, and profound alterations of appearance such as tattoos, body piercing, cosmetic surgery or dying the hair an unnatural color (such as green, purple or blue). This rule should be self-explanatory. We send the student back in the same condition that we received them. If a student is pushing for something that you believe falls within this restricted category, feel free to suggest that they call your LC.

## **Local, State and Federal Laws**

Students must comply with all local, state and federal laws and regulations. Claiming ignorance is not considered a valid defense against breaking the law. Most laws are fairly apparent. However, there are situations where this may not be the case. One of our students was expelled from his high school for setting off the fire alarm at school. The laws governing fire alarms were set by the local government, and setting off an alarm in that school calls for immediate expulsion. This WAS in the School Handbook, which the student had been required to sign, stating that he had read it in its entirety and agreed to comply with all school rules and regulations. The student argued that he didn't know he would get in trouble for setting off the alarm. Apparently, teenagers from all countries think that parents are idiots!

## **Travel - within the US**

If you plan to travel with your student in the United States, prior to your departure, please be prepared to email your LC with your trip information noting where you will go, contact phone numbers and return. Travel forms are not required for travel with immediate host family or school sponsored trips. All other travel does require a form to be completed. A travel form can be requested from your LC or the national office. Just because a student has an opportunity to go on a trip is not a guarantee that the trip will be approved by our national office.

## **Travel -Travel Outside the US with your Student**

If you travel with your student outside the US you MUST notify SAI. There are important documents that need validating BEFORE you leave in order for your student to return into the United States, Travel requests for travel outside the US must be submitted to the National Office of SAI no later than 30 prior to your trip departure.

\*Send the following to the SAI national office **MAILING ADDRESS** by an *overnight traceable mail method only* method i.e. Federal Express, UPS or USPS overnight:

- The students original form DS-2019 (copies will not be accepted).
- A completed Travel Release Form with all appropriate signatures
- A self-addressed, overnight, prepaid envelope via Federal Express, UPS, or U. S. Postal Service Express Mail for the return of your documents. (Students are responsible for these expenses, and no exceptions will be made.) If papers are received with no prepaid return envelope, paperwork will be held in national office until prepaid arrangements have been made.

No out of country travel will be approved after April 30th each year of participants program.

*\*For any travel, deadlines are in place and should you wish to travel you must submit all information PRIOR TO THE DEADLINE to be considered for attendance. If you miss the deadline, it will only affect you as reservations and meal plans must be made well enough in advance in order to ensure a great trip. Turn in your forms on time to avoid missing an opportunity.*

## **High School Code of Conduct and Student Guidelines.**

Students must follow all guidelines in the High School Code of Conduct or Student Handbook, regardless of how the student feels about the rules. A student is a guest in his/her high school, which requires exemplary behavior. SAI will take disciplinary action against students with persistent disciplinary problems. Students may get dismissed from their high school for persistent disciplinary problems. SAI is not required to place a student in a new high school if he/she is dismissed from his/her original school. If this occurs, the student will be terminated from the program and sent home. It is a privilege for international students to be allowed to attend an American public high school. They are invited guests, attending school at taxpayer expense. We expect our students to demonstrate appropriate respect to both teachers and students at all times. Under no circumstances should you tolerate your student making comments like “my country’s schools are better, the kids are stupid, they let anybody attend this school (most foreign countries still segregate special needs students),” or any similar statement. Although this may be a sign of homesickness, it is unacceptable. Please advise your LC of any negative statements your student makes regarding their school experience. As stated below, all SAI students are required to take an English and American History class as part of their curriculum. Quite often, this means that the student may be taking one or both of these classes with students who are younger than they are, and they should do so with grace. Students may request particular classes of interest, if space is available, but may NOT demand a class because of some requirement in their home country. They also may not demand an honors level class. In actuality, they would likely have difficulty maintaining a grade of “C” in an honors class because they are taking it in a foreign language (English). International students are required to take a peer-appropriate course load, not load up their schedule with electives. Students should actively participate in school-related activities, particularly on a team sport. Being a member of a sports team is the quickest and easiest way for a student to make new friends. However, the student should not expect to be placed on a varsity team, even if they are quite talented. Participation in a sport is a means of making friends, not a way to demonstrate how good an athlete he/she is.

## **School Attendance and Grades**

Students must attend school every day unless they are ill and excused by a doctor. Most school districts have this as a policy. They must maintain a grade of "C" in ALL classes at all times. Failure to comply with this rule may result in disciplinary action. Students must take at least one English class and one American History class. This may require that the student is placed in a class with students who are younger than he/she is. Since our program is academic and cultural in nature, we expect our students to be diligent about their studies. Some countries will recognize the student’s year of study in America, while others will not. Whether or not the student will receive credit for their exchange year when they return to their natural country should make no difference in how seriously they take their studies while under our program. They are to do all assignments, turn in all homework, take all quizzes and tests, and receive no special treatment. Exchange students are not entitled to ESL (English as a Second Language) support while they are attending school in the United States. The Department of State requires that international students take a typical course load, in English, without additional support.

## **Visits of Natural Parents/Friends/Relatives and Students Temporary Home Return.**

Natural parents, friends, and relatives from abroad may visit the student **ONLY** after your student has successfully completed their first semester. Visitors should not expect to stay with the host family. Students are not allowed to return home temporarily at any time during the program, except due to the death or imminent death of a family member. One of the most disruptive events that can occur during an exchange program is a visit from family or friends from home. It is exceptionally difficult for students to separate from their family friends, adapt to a completely alien culture, and develop a strong bond with their host family. If the student's year is interrupted by a visit, they are then torn between their life in America and their life back home. Once the visit is over, most suffer from homesickness. Depending on when the visit occurs, they may never get back on track with their American experience or relationship with their host family and new friends. The same is true if the student were allowed to return home for a vacation, only in reverse. Under no circumstances will SAI allow a visit during the first semester, or allow the student to go home, unless there is a death or imminent death of an immediate family member. If you hear that a student's family (or relative or friend) plans a visit, contact your LC immediately. This is an awkward situation, and would more appropriately be handled by an SAI representative than you as the host parent. The student and/or family is likely to be angry, and it is better that they be angry with SAI than you.

Often, students' parents come to visit at the end of the program. It is an opportunity for them to visit the United States, and meet the family who has become an integral part of their child's life. A visit such as this can be rewarding for everyone. However, you should feel under no obligation to host the family in your home during a visit. In order to avoid an awkward situation, simply suggest what airport to fly into, how to get to your specific area, and the hotels that are close by.

## **Employment**

Per Department of State regulations, students are not allowed to secure employment while under the SAI Program. However, they may accept non-competitive employment, such as baby-sitting or lawn mowing, but must not exceed 10 hours a week. This rule is very straightforward. These are perfectly acceptable ways for the students to stay occupied with a constructive activity, and earn a small amount of money.

## **Change of Medical Status**

If there is an undisclosed medical condition which is diagnosed after the student's arrival in the United States, your LC or SAI must be notified immediately, in order to determine what steps must be taken. Failure to do so may compromise your status with the SAI Program. All student applicants to our exchange program are required to disclose any medical condition that they have. If a student is diagnosed with an undisclosed medical condition after they have arrived in your home, contact SAI immediately – either the national office at 1-800-639-0564, or your LC. Depending on the condition, and your family's feelings about it, there are several options available to us. For example, if a heart condition which is discovered during a routine sports physical would require that the student return home for treatment. On the other hand, a mild allergy which develops when the student arrives (a fairly common occurrence), and can be easily managed, does not have the same consequences. We would need to know what is required to manage the condition, then determine if you and your family have no objections to the student continuing to stay in your home.

If you do not want to continue to host the student, then we would look to moving the student to a new family.

### **Change of Host Families**

A student may not change host families unless an SAI LC has approved the move, and completed all of the necessary documentation. If difficulties arise between the host family and the student, it is important that you first attempt to resolve the problem by speaking to your student. If this does not resolve your problem, speak with your LC, then your Regional Director or the National Office if necessary. A student may NOT, under any circumstances, make the decision to move. Sometimes, when there is friction between a student and his/her host family, they attempt to resolve the problem by finding a friend to live with. If your student tells you that he/she is moving to a new home, you should contact your LC immediately. As you know from your own experience with SAI, the screening and placement process is time consuming, with a lot of required documentation. Under no circumstances may a student make any decision regarding a move. All decisions regarding the placement of our students are made by SAI – we are their legal guardians while they are under our program. If you are hosting a student, and it isn't working out for either of you, a move may be required. However, it is still handled by SAI. The LC may ask the student if he/she knows a family who might be interested in hosting him/her. At that point, the LC will get in touch with the family to determine their interest, and if they meet the necessary host family requirements considered by our organization. If so, all of the necessary documentation would be required, which could take several days.

*We ask that you exercise patience with your student in times of difficulties. Ask yourself, what if this were your child in another country and how would you want him or her to be treated if you were not there to help. Our students are not disposable.*

### **Proper Clothing**

The dress code in the United States is much more conservative than in many other countries. We expect ALL students to dress in proper clothing for both the United States and their host communities. The following are examples of unacceptable clothing and/or accessories:

- Thong underwear that can be seen by anyone other than the wearer.
- Skin-tight pants, shirts or sweaters.
- Shirts or sweaters that show the stomach, midriff, or cleavage.
- Halter tops or shirts with no sleeves or straps.
- Obscene t-shirts or other clothing.
- Skirts and shorts that are shorter than where your fingertips touch your leg.

Be sure to check with your local high school for additional dress code rules. As with many teenagers, clothing of international students may be an issue. What they are allowed to wear in their native country is of no concern towards your schools policies.

The student must adhere to our dress requirements, and those of your local community. The students may arrive with clothing that is inappropriate. You may need to provide them with guidance on what is acceptable, and what is not. If your school has a dress code, provide the student

with the guidelines. Although it is more common for this to be a girl issue, boys may have issues as well. If necessary, be firm. If this does not work, call your LC for intervention.

### **Host Family Responsibility**

You are offering to an international student a safe place to stay, nourishing food, and supervision. It may sound a little trite, but it is still true: you are helping promote world peace and understanding. In an age when the United States is undisputed as a major world power, it is important for people of other countries and cultures to understand us as individuals. Student exchange is a very effective way to do this. You aren't just any family - you are representing your community and our country. From this time forward, your student and his/her family, will think of you as the American family by which all others are measured.

Accepting a teenager, whom you have never met before, as a member of your family will require patience, a sense of humor, and sometimes a firm hand. You may find the hosting experience to be quite different than what you expected. Whatever your experience turns out to be, in most all cases, host families find it to be exceptionally rewarding. The following are your basic responsibilities as a host family. Hopefully, we have covered most of your concerns here and elsewhere within this handbook. However, if you have additional questions, your LC is always available to help.

### **Student's Arrival**

Call the airline before you leave for the airport to double-check the flight's arrival time. Carry a sign with your student's name on it- it should be at least the size of a full sheet of paper - and hold it up when the passengers begin to exit the gate. You may have exchanged photos, and think you will recognize one another, but a name on paper can avoid a lot of confusion at the airport. Some families also bring a stuffed animal, or balloons to welcome their students. Do what feels right for you and your family. Don't expect your student to speak good English at the airport, or to understand everything you say. No matter how excited he/she is about being here, he/she is also scared and tired.

Before you leave the airport after picking your student up, be sure your student has both his/her passport and airline ticket. The student should keep these in a safe place at your home. The arrival airline ticket usually contains the return ticket. Don't allow the student to throw it away, even if the student is sure he/she does not need it again. Don't allow the student to remove any papers stapled into the passport - they are the visa and immigration card. Your student needs them in order to exit the United States.

Home at last! Take your student on a tour of his/her new home, and show him/her their bedroom. Allow them to place their bags in the bedroom where they will sleep but save the unpacking for later. If you put the student in their room right away to unpack, they will inadvertently become isolated and start texting with friends and family back home. The most successful integrations happen when you plan an activity the day your student arrives. Whether going to the grocery store, a park or a family dinner, getting your student involved right away is key to a great start. Remember, it is important to just go about your daily life.

Try to spend a couple of hours with your student before they begin the settling in routine of unpacking their bags. This helps them blend in to the family right away rather than isolating them to their room where potential homesickness can settle in. Later encourage him/her to unpack, and show them where to store their suitcases. If the student is sharing a bedroom, be definite about where he/she can put their own things. Show him/her which bathroom to use. If you are hosting a girl, show her how and where to dispose of sanitary napkins or tampons. If you are matter-of-fact about this from the beginning you will prevent embarrassment and possibly a plumbing bill later on. In the kitchen, be brief but clear, such as, "If you're thirsty, have some juice or milk. Here's a sandwich if you wake up tonight and are very hungry. Tomorrow I'll show you where everything is." Tell him/her how you expect them to dress when he/she leaves their bedroom, such as, "put on a shirt and pants when you come downstairs." Tell the student what time breakfast is eaten, and if he/she must join you at that time. Remember, the student is not on a vacation with you, so helping him/her adjust to the host family rules and guidelines quickly is imperative. If your student is very tired, encourage him/her to stay up until a reasonable bedtime- at least 8:00 p.m., to help their bodies adjust to their new time zone. Many international students find themselves awake at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning for the first few days. Anticipate this, and encourage your student to get a light snack (it is best to have one ready), and go back to bed until it is time to get up.

Be open and clear about what you expect. You cannot assume he will know what needs to be done or how it needs to be done. Becoming a responsible member of a new family is an important part of being an exchange student. Use the Host Family Workbook to outline the specifics of your family's routine, privileges and restrictions, and chores.

A few students find themselves overwhelmed by the differences and react in extremes. They either "love" everything, or "hate" everything. None of us likes to hear "I hate America," or "I hate Middletown," or "I hate this stupid school," etc. A student who talks this way at school is making his/her life very difficult, since they certainly won't make friends with this attitude. Let her know that, even if he/she feels this way, it is inappropriate to make these negative statements. A student who makes negative statements such as this not just once in a while (in frustration or anger), but frequently, needs some extra help from your LC. Don't let it get out of hand.

The following are your basic responsibilities as a host family. Hopefully, we have covered most of your concerns here and elsewhere within this handbook. However, if you have additional questions, your LC is always available to help.

### **Room & Board – Not a Bed & Breakfast**

At this point in the process, providing room and board should seem pretty clear to you. You provide the student with a room alone or shared with a same-sex host sibling within five years of their age is just fine. Obviously, the room needs to have a door that closes in order to provide the student with those times when he/she needs privacy to change clothes, etc. Bureau and closet space for his/her clothing and possessions. Simple? Well, not exactly. What really falls into this category are the day-to-day living issues. It's integrating a new person into your family.

At the end of this handbook you will find a Host Family Workbook. It is important to use the Workbook as a guide to develop a livable relationship with your student. You don't want to get to a point in your relationship where you love your student, but just can't live with them. Remember,

they don't know unless you tell them. Completing the Workbook with your student shortly after his/her arrival should help you plan for the basics: meals, established times (for curfew, bed, etc.), chores, laundry, use of electronics (computer, internet, TV, etc.), telephone use, money, and pet peeves. It would be helpful to review the Workbook prior to completing it with your student. Some decisions may require thought and you want your position clear in your own mind before discussing the household rules with your student.

The remainder of this section will address the "board" portion of the Room and Board heading above – meaning food. You are expected to provide two meals a day of nutritious food for your student. You are not required to provide them with junk food or sweets, sodas or bottled water. We are not saying that you can't allow this type of food, only that you are not required to provide it. If they want junk food or sweets, it is perfectly acceptable to ask that they purchase it from their own funds if you do not normally keep these items on hand or you student your student is eating or drinking too much of it. You are also not expected to wait on your student. It is reasonable to expect the student to make his/her own breakfast – a bowl of cereal, toast, etc. It is also reasonable to expect the student to be able to make a sandwich for lunch. On school days, the student is required to buy his/her own lunch in the school cafeteria or buying items from the store to take, out of their own funds. Most students are not prepared to cook their own dinner, and this will most often fall to you. However, their chores should include some assistance at mealtime, when you are preparing the meal, or for setting the table and or clean-up. There will, almost certainly, be occasions when you will not be home to prepare dinner. Let the student know that he/she will have to make his/her own meal, and suggest what is available. Most students come from areas where meals are made fresh each day. Be sure to show your student the freezer and cupboards for the readymade meals and snacks Americans traditionally have and show proper use of your microwave - NO METAL. They may not see fresh items in your refrigerator and assume "there is no food". Be clear up front with how a typical family eats and make it clear that certain foods should be eaten in moderation. It is also known that most students will drink excess amounts of sodas and juices. If your student drinks more than that of your family, then explain to the student they can buy for themselves and you would be happy to provide a space for them to keep their special item. Food may become an issue in one of two areas: portion size, and being picky. Some teenagers, if allowed, could eat you out of house and home. You are expected to provide them with one, normal, adult-sized portion per meal. The student may be allowed second servings if you so choose, but it should not be expected. Students are expected to eat what is provided to them. Remember, you are a volunteer in this program, not a restaurant. Unless the student has specifically disclosed a valid food issue on his/her application, such as being a vegetarian, they eat what you eat. It is rude and unacceptable for a student to refuse to eat food that you prepare or provide, simply because they don't like it. Any difficulties that may arise related to food should be reported to your LC.

### **Emotional Support**

Know When to Call Your LC Teenagers are teenagers everywhere. Whether they are willing to admit it or not, they need emotional support from their parent(s) - YOU. They will likely be anxious when they first arrive, and need your reassurance. Their first day of school will likely be difficult as well, and some students have been known to come home crying, "I can't do this!" They can do this – they are just frightened. Your student may complain of headaches the first days after they arrive, and the first days of school. This is most often due to speaking English exclusively when they arrive, and learning in English when they begin school. Reassure them that the

headaches will likely go away after a few days, once their brain has adapted to the demand of being exclusively English-speaking. Girls, like girls everywhere, suffer from PMS to a certain degree. If your student is a girl, it would be helpful to know her menstrual cycle so that you can remind her about when she may be emotional due to PMS, and when the cause may be something else. Providing emotional support and reassuring your student probably sounds pretty easy. However, don't confuse coddling with reassurance. Exchange students, as a group, are pretty resilient. Don't fall into the trap of thinking, "if this were my child, living so far away from home, I'd want someone to kiss their hurts, and make everything better." International students are coming from cultures quite different from ours. Many of them have been traveling independently since they were 14! We don't need to kiss their hurts, we need to remind them how important their decision was to become an exchange student, and that "this too shall pass." If your student becomes reclusive (spending all free time in his/her bedroom), does not eat (or has a poor attitude toward food), cries frequently, becomes belligerent, refuses to do chores, or other notable behaviors, call your LC and share your concerns.

### **Assistance With School Registration**

Prior to your student's arrival, call the high school and make an appointment to register him/her for classes. Most schools will place the student in class levels based on their English proficiency; it is a good idea to schedule the appointment for 5 to 7 days after their arrival. Although our students are required to meet certain English proficiency standards, many of them have been taught English by British teachers. The student often needs an adjustment period of several days to adapt to our pronunciations before their comprehension will be solid, and he/she will be able to converse with the school staff member.

If your high school has a website, or a course catalog, it would be helpful for your student to review the course offerings prior to their registration appointment. Remind the student that he/she should mark which classes he/she is interested in, and that their ability to take classes of interest will be based on his/her schedule and availability. Prior to your registration appointment, review the Rules of the Program (specifically points 9 and 10) outlined earlier in this Handbook which addresses school issues, as well as the section later in this Handbook entitled High School.

### **Reasonable Transportation**

One of the biggest shocks to international students when they arrive is our lack of a mass transit system. Our country is unique in its dependence on the private passenger automobile for transportation in all but the most populated metropolitan areas. No matter what your application said about transportation, or what the students have been told in their home countries, it is just beyond their comprehension that they can't hop on a train or bus to get where they need to go. Your student will need to plan for transportation needs. You should request that he/she give you a minimum of two day's notice if they need a ride to some school-related activity or social event. Granted, they may not always remember, or something may come up last minute, but it is important to get your student in the habit of thinking about transportation when they make arrangements to do something that requires that you drive them. If the student joins a team sport or after school activity, transportation needs to be considered as well. Some schools have a late bus to

accommodate these situations – others do not. If there is no bus option, explain the concept of a car pool to the student, and see what can be arranged to reduce your driving burden.

## **Communication and Conflict Resolution**

As we see on public service announcements on television, “talk to your kids.” With teenagers, that is sometimes easier said than done. When the teenager was raised by someone else, in a totally different culture, it can be quite a challenge. However, open communication with your student will go a long way to a successful exchange experience for you, your family, and your student.

- Don't argue with the way your student sees things. Instead, state your own case and speak from that. "I have a different opinion," "This is what I believe," "This is the way I see it." "This is how we do it".
- Don't talk down to your teenager. There's nothing more irritating than a condescending tone.
- Don't lecture or preach. Again, this only provokes hostility. Besides, the average teenager goes "deaf" after hearing about five sentences.
- Don't set limits you can't enforce.
- Do focus on the behavior, not the person.
- Do think ahead to what you will say and how you will say it.
- Do keep your messages clear and concise.
- Do stick to one issue at a time.

It is important to try and understand a bit about the culture of your student's native country. We have brief descriptions of the cultures of our students' countries on our website. Go to [www.studentamericaninternational.com](http://www.studentamericaninternational.com). On the menu item for SAI Families, there is a link to Cultural History. Select the country of your student, and read the description. Once your student arrives, have him/her share as much as possible about life in their home country. One fairly common cultural difference is that students from many countries continue to have their main meal at our lunch time. For these students, it is difficult for them to adapt to a small lunch, and a large meal shortly before they go to bed. Another difference which often seems shocking to our host families is that is not uncommon for a teenager to have a curfew of 4:00 a.m. Conflict with your student often revolves around cultural differences. If you understand the cultural differences between your student's native country, and ours, it is easier to understand why the student may have more difficulty adapting to some of our rules than with others. *It is still the responsibility of the student to adapt to life in America*, whether they agree with our rules or not – the rules are the rules. An understanding but firm conversation with your student should resolve most conflict. However, if your student is continually challenging you, your household rules, or the SAI Program Rules, it's time to call your LC for assistance and guidance. The student's behavior may be as a result of homesickness, a problem at school, or just being an unpleasant child.

Your LC has been trained in conflict resolution, and should be able to help you and your student work through the problem.

## **Safety of Students**

The safety of our students is paramount. While international students are under our program, SAI is their legal guardian. We take the responsibility for our students very seriously, and all decisions

we make are in their best interest. As the host parent, we expect that you will share in our responsibility for the student's safety. Encourage your student to make friends, but as you would with your own child, be sure you are comfortable with those friends. Keep an eye on your student's developing friendships and try to meet his/her friends, check where they are going, if a teenager is driving, be sure you know them and that they are a safe driver, etc. Be ready to step in if you think you see trouble ahead.

Your student may object to what they perceive as being "babied." At home, most of them have had a significant amount of freedom. Explain to them that we are responsible for their safety and well-being while they are in our care, and will make decisions accordingly. Just like teenagers everywhere, they are kids, but think that they are adults.

One area where our students are particularly vulnerable is what forms of showing affection are appropriate, and preventing seductive behavior. For the protection of our students and host families, it is important that their behavior, as well as the behavior of adults in their American lives, do not increase the risk of unacceptable situations or abuse.

### **Guidelines for Showing Affection**

SAI encourages love and affection between our host families and exchange students. However, it is important to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate forms of affection. Due to cultural differences, this distinction is not always clear. Although each culture differs somewhat in what is acceptable versus unacceptable when displaying affection, the following guidelines apply to American culture.

*Some positive and appropriate forms of affection between host parents or other adults and students are listed below:*

- Brief hugs.
- Pats on the shoulder or back.
- Handshakes.
- "High-fives" and hand slapping. Holding hands during prayer
- Verbal praise.
- Brief touches to hands, faces, shoulders and arms.
- Arms around shoulders.

*The following forms of affection are considered **inappropriate** between host parents or other adults and students:*

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces.
- Adult holding hands with student.
- Kisses on the mouth.
- Student sitting on the lap of an adult.
- Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas.
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas or other private rooms.
- Occupying a bed with the student for any purpose.
- Touching knees or legs.
- Wrestling, tickling or piggyback rides.

- Any type of massage.
- Any form of unwanted affection.
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) by adult to student that relate to physique or body development. Examples would be, “You sure are developing,” or “You look really hot in those jeans.”
- Giving gifts or money to the student. Buying affection.
- Private meals in an intimate environment.

### **Guidelines for Preventing Seductive Behavior**

As with displays of affection, there are differences among cultures regarding what constitutes modesty and seductive behavior. The following guidelines apply to American culture for both students and adults.

#### **Modesty**

- Absolutely no nudity under any circumstances, unless alone and behind a closed door.
- No contact between adults and student while either is wearing only undergarments.
- Bathrobes or housecoats should be worn over sleepwear.
- No suggestive or revealing clothing.
- Student must strictly adhere to school or church dress code.
- No thong bathing suits.
- Seductive Behavior
- Absolutely no flirting between adults and student.
- No language or jokes with sexual connotations.

Your student will receive these guidelines at his/her Student Orientation Meeting, so he/she should act appropriately. However, if you have concerns about how your student demonstrates affection, or with his/her modesty or behavior which may be perceived as seductive, speak with them directly. If you are unable to resolve the problem, contact your LC for assistance. In the unfortunate event that your student indicates that some other individual is inappropriate with him/her, you should discuss the situation with your LC and determine how best to proceed.

### **Adjustment Issues**

Adjusting to life in America takes time. You and your student will need to be flexible and willing to learn from one another. You may find yourself surprised, dismayed, amused and sometimes even offended by what your student takes for granted about life. Your student also will be surprised, dismayed, amused and sometimes even offended about the realities of life here. A good sense of humor and lots of goodwill helps both of you.

Intercultural adjustment tends to follow a pattern. Becoming familiar with this cycle may help you deal with it. The pattern is in three phases:

- One: Enchantment or Euphoria Gosh! This is so great! I love it here! Everything is fantastic!
- Two: Disenchantment or Negativity. Why did I do this? I hate everything about this rotten place. No one knows how to do anything right. It's boring and stupid. I shouldn't have come here. Maybe if I change families I'll feel better. Maybe I should go home now.
- Three: Reality. I like my host family most of the time. I don't like doing the dishes, but hey, at least I don't have to do them by myself. Some of my teachers at school are really great. I don't

like riding the bus. I like my electives a lot. Living here is OK. Tonight we're going to the basketball game. I think we'll win.

Encouragement and support from you is important to a student who is feeling "down." Be open to hearing his/her complaints and feelings. Listen carefully. Don't deny his/her unhappiness or bad feelings.

Help your student understand the conflicting emotions he/she is going through, and remind him/her that they are common and normal.

### **Try to Limit Contact With Family And Friends for a While**

Frequent contact with family and friends back home undermines your student's ability to adapt to life in America. If the student has frequent contact with family and friends, either by telephone or e-mail/internet, their body may be here, but their mind and heart are still back home. We expect that the student will require more frequent contact with their family during the first week or two that they are here. However, following that, we recommend two skype calls per month to family, and e-mail on a weekly basis. Instant messaging should be discouraged, and snail mail (postal service) is encouraged. We cover this issue at the Student Orientation Meeting, and it is in the Student Handbook, so it will not be a surprise, but that doesn't mean that the student will like it, or that it is easy. Students who object to restricted contact with their family and friends are often the ones most at risk of being homesick. Internet use should be allowed only in a common area of the home. SAI recommends the following for computer and cell phone use:

**Please note the following are guidelines only. Your student will use his/her phone just like any typical teenager will, all the time. Do not try to enforce a rule you do not enforce on your own children in the home. Do let them know if it is becoming an issue with your family though.**

\*Host family may designate a place in the home where cell phones and computers are to be turned in nightly to avoid overnight use/abuse. This is especially common due to time changes in home countries.

\*Password protect your internet connection. If you have any concerns about your student's internet usage, we recommend protecting the access but only during these times.

\*Computers are recommended to be used in a common area of the home. Dining room, living room/ family room. *Allowing student to use electronics in the bedroom may create isolation from the family and cause homesickness for the student.*

If your student does not limit their contact with family and friends after the first month, please tell your LC, and have him/her address the problem directly with the student if it is affecting your relationship with them. Any additional information you feel you need to share with your student should be added in the workbook section. SAI strongly recommends that students purchase a cell phone at Wal-Mart or another store, on a pay as you go. Host families should not add students on their personal cell phone agreements as your student or SAI cannot be held liable for loss or abuse or contracts. The same applies to gym memberships and other services that require contracts.

## **English Only In America**

While your student is in America, he/she should speak only English. There are obvious reasons for this, including just being polite, improving the student's proficiency, and increasing the rate at which they will begin to "think" in English. In some cases, this will not be a problem where the student is not around students and others from their home country. In other situations, where there are multiple students from the same country placed in the same school, this can become an ongoing problem. If your student is in this situation, remind them why we require English only, and also tell them that they will not be accepted by other students in their school if they separate themselves by language. The only exception to the English only requirement is when he/she is on the telephone with his/her natural parents. This does include internet usage. English only should include all social media outlets. Remind them their parents spent thousands of dollars for them to come and here they should be improving their English like their parents want.

## **Culture Shock**

Culture shock is defined as "a condition of anxiety and disorientation that can affect someone suddenly exposed to a new culture." Anxiety and disorientation can present themselves in many ways. They sneak up on you and your student. Your student isn't going to turn to you one day and say, "I have culture shock." He/she may not know there's a problem. Look for these signs:

- Excessive homesickness
- Frequent and persistent criticism of the USA and insistence that things are better "at home"
- Persistent sadness and depression
- Spending a lot of time alone, usually in his/her room
- Frequent feelings of tiredness and/or sleeping too much
- Eating too much, or not at all
- Weight gain or loss
- Wanting to spend most of his/her time with other exchange students
- Refusal to communicate
- Irritability or anger without any apparent reason

Culture shock may not happen right away. It is often weeks, and sometimes months, before it appears. It takes time to adjust to life in America and your home. You and your student need support and help if and when culture shock appears. Your LC is your best resource.

## **Loss Of Freedom**

Exchange students may be far more independent and "worldly" than American students of the same age. As we covered earlier in this Handbook, our country is unique in its dependence on the motor vehicle as our primary means of transportation. Exchange Students are generally accustomed to mass transportation, both bus and train, as their means of transportation. Your student may have been using mass transportation independently for several years. It is quite a jolt for them to come to America and find that, in most cases, they are dependent on their host parents for transportation. For most students, this loss of independence is quite difficult to adjust to, even if they don't complain. A significant cultural difference between our country and many others is

teenage curfew. A typical weekend curfew for an American 16 or 17 year old is around 11:00 p.m. In many European countries, the curfew for teenagers of this age is 4:00 a.m. Obviously, this is a significant difference, and it is not a surprise when a student balks at the early curfew. Our students are told about transportation, curfews, and drinking many times before they arrive. However, when they are actually faced with a total loss of freedom and independence, it is quite difficult for many of them to cope with. Even if they don't complain about it, it is important that you be aware that they may be wrestling with this as they adjust to life in an American family.

### **Homesickness**

Homesickness is different from culture shock. While culture shock tends to set in after a period of time, homesickness may overcome your student on the way home from the airport. It is generally overwhelming for a student when they first arrive – everything is totally new, speaking a foreign language 24/7 is probably harder than they thought, their sleep pattern is likely disturbed, the food may not agree with their stomach, and the list goes on and on. It is important to reassure your student that homesickness is normal, and will pass by maintaining a positive attitude, keeping busy, and not contacting family and friends back home too often.

There are a couple of times that we expect to see homesickness, but it can happen at any time. Some students become homesick as soon as they arrive, for others it comes at about six weeks (once the excitement is over and the newness has worn off), over the Christmas holidays, on his/her birthday, or that of a close family member. Homesickness is quite common, and should be transitory. If it persists, contact your LC for assistance.

### **Firearms**

The use of firearms is not permitted under any circumstances by our exchange students. Many of our host families go hunting annually and while students are permitted to travel with proper permissions, they are not allowed to use a gun of any type. Bow and Arrow are allowed.

### **Money**

Your student's natural family will provide spending money for him/her during the exchange experience. How will your student have access to that money? The answer depends. Some students arrive with a credit card and/or ATM card, some with traveler's checks, some receive money wired to them monthly, and others come with a substantial amount of cash. Do not hold your students money for them. Do provide them a safe, secure area to keep their money in. Unfortunately, the student will not be able to open a bank account while here because the bank needs a social security number in order to open the account. The student should keep their money and valuables (such as their passport, etc.) in a safe place. A good choice is a fire-proof box, which they can purchase from an office supply store. Your student's money should be completely separate from your own. Do not co-mingle funds. Depositing the student's money into your bank account, and then withdrawing it as needed, may seem like the best solution. It is not! Don't lend money to your student, and don't borrow money from him/her.

Talk with your LC if you think your student is spending too much or too little. SAI suggests \$300 a month should cover a student's expenses in most states, and requires that the natural parent(s)

provide this to their child while they are here. If it appears that your student is budgeting their money carefully, and they still do not have enough, tell your LC, who will then discuss the situation with the national office. If it is determined that the student needs additional funds, the request should either come from the student or the SAI national office. Remember, an important lesson your student will learn will be budgeting their money properly.

## **High School**

Although we have addressed school-related issues earlier in this Handbook, there are a few additional points that need to be covered. You already know that your student is to attend school regularly, and must maintain a "C" average in every subject at all times. As you also know, the student must take English and American History, and be prepared to be placed in a class with younger students in order to meet this program requirement.

The student's school counselor or advisor should be just that - a school counselor. The student is to discuss only school-related issues with their school counselor/advisor and/or teachers. If your student has a question or concern about living with an American family (yours in particular), they are to speak with you, their host parent. If he/she has a question or concern about the exchange experience, he must talk with an SAI representative. He should not go to his school counselor with this kind of problem. Personal problems are not to be addressed by school staff, but by their host parent, LC, or other SAI representative.

Educational standards and expectations overseas can be very different from those in the USA. Homework is common in American high schools. Your student may not have been required to do homework in his/her native country. In addition, students are generally unprepared for the number of quizzes and tests that are common in our schools, especially "pop" quizzes. It would be a good idea to warn your student of these differences. Be prepared for comments like, "that's not fair!," especially regarding "pop quizzes." Explain that, fair or not, it is part of our academic culture, and something that they need to accept.

Finally, maintain open communication with your student's teachers. If the student is not doing assignments, or doing poorly in any class, speak to the student directly. If this does not resolve the problem, tell your LC. Also, watch for the student who attempts to use their "poor" English as an excuse to get out of a quiz, test, or assignment. The State Department requires that the student's English be at a proficiency level to handle a typical American high school course load, and remember that they are not entitled to ESL (English as a Second Language) support.

## **Vacations**

Many families invite their student to accompany them vacation. Extend the invitation to the student with as much notice as possible. Discuss with the student what expenses he/she will be responsible for, and what the approximate costs will be (including spending money for mementos or gifts). Generally, the cost will require that the student ask their natural parent(s) for additional funds in order to accompany you on the vacation. Have the student ask their parent(s) if they will give their permission for the student to accompany you, and if they will provide the additional funds necessary to cover the student's expenses. If you are planning a vacation and your student will not accompany you, be sure to make arrangements for him/her to have adequate supervision while you are away. Prior to your departure, notify your LC of your travel plans, the supervision plans for

the student, and how you can be reached while you are away. And remember, as stated in the Program Rules, students should not miss school days for travel.

A reminder on travel:

#### Travel With Your Student Within The United States

If you plan to travel with your student in the United States, please be prepared to email your LC with your trip information noting where you will go, contact phone numbers and return. Travel forms are not required for travel with host family or school sponsored trips. All other travel does require a signed permission form to be completed.

#### Travel With Your Student Outside The United States

Leaving the country is not generally a problem, but readmission is. Travel outside of the United States may be possible, provided you adhere to the procedures exactly as outlined in item 9 in this handbook.

## U. S. Department of State Requirements

Title 22 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) Chapter I (4–1–02 Edition) § 62.25

(a) *Purpose.* This section governs Department of State designated exchange visitor programs under which foreign secondary school students are afforded the opportunity to study in the United States at accredited public or private secondary schools for an academic semester or an academic year, while living with American host families or residing at accredited U.S. boarding schools.

(b) *Program sponsor eligibility.* Eligibility for designation as a secondary school student exchange visitor program sponsor is limited to organizations:

(1) With tax-exempt status as conferred by the Internal Revenue Service pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; and

(2) Which are United States citizens as such term is defined in § 62.2.

(c) *Program eligibility.* Secondary school student exchange visitor programs designated by the Department of State must:

(1) Require all exchange students to be enrolled and participating in a full course of study at an accredited academic institution;

(2) Allow entry of exchange students for not less than one academic semester (or quarter equivalency) and not more than two academic semesters (or quarter equivalency) duration; and

(3) Ensure that the program is conducted on a U.S. academic calendar year basis, except for students from countries whose academic year is opposite that of the United States. Exchange students may begin an exchange program in the second semester of a U.S. academic year only if specifically permitted to do so, in writing, by the school in which the exchange student is enrolled. In all cases, sponsors must notify both the host family and school prior to the exchange student's arrival in the United States whether the placement is for an academic semester, an academic year, or a calendar year.

(d) *Program administration.* Sponsors must ensure that all organizational officers, employees, representatives, agents, and volunteers acting on their behalf:

(1) Are adequately trained. Sponsors must administer training for local coordinators that specifically includes, at a minimum, instruction in: Conflict resolution; procedures for handling and reporting emergency situations; awareness or knowledge of child safety standards; information on sexual conduct codes; procedures for handling and reporting allegations of sexual misconduct or any other allegations of abuse or neglect; and the criteria to be used to screen potential host families and exercise good judgment when identifying what constitutes suitable host family placements. In addition to their own training, sponsors must ensure that all local coordinators complete the Department of State mandated training module prior to their appointment as a local coordinator or assumption of duties. The Department of State training module will include instruction designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Exchange Visitor Program; its public diplomacy objectives; and the Secondary School Student category rules and regulations. Sponsors must demonstrate the individual's successful completion of all initial training requirements and that annual refresher training is also successfully completed.

(2) Are adequately supervised. Sponsors must create and implement organization-specific standard operating procedures for the supervision of local coordinators designed to prevent or deter fraud, abuse, or misconduct in the performance of the duties of these employees/agents/volunteers. They must also have sufficient internal controls to ensure that such employees/agents/volunteers comply with such standard operating procedures.

(3) Have been vetted annually through a criminal background check (which must include a search of the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Registry);

(4) Place no exchange student with his or her relatives;

(5) Make no exchange student placement beyond 120 miles of the home of the local coordinator authorized to act on the sponsor's behalf in both routine and emergency matters arising from that exchange student's participation in the Exchange Visitor Program;

(6) Make no monetary payments or other incentives to host families;

(7) Provide exchange students with reasonable access to their natural parents and family by telephone and e-mail;

(8) Make certain that the exchange student's government issued documents ( *i.e.* , passports, Forms DS-2019) are not removed from his/her possession;

(9) Conduct the host family orientation after the host family has been fully vetted and accepted;

(10) Refrain, without exception, from acting as:

(i) Both a host family and a local coordinator or area supervisor for an exchange student;

(ii) A host family for one sponsor and a local coordinator for another sponsor; or

(iii) A local coordinator for any exchange student over whom he/she has a position of trust or authority such as the student's teacher or principal. This requirement is not applicable to a boarding school placement.

(11) Maintain, at minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the exchange student. The first monthly contact between the local coordinator and the exchange student must be in person. All other contacts may take place in-person, on the

phone, or via electronic mail and must be properly documented. The sponsor is responsible for ensuring that issues raised through such contacts are promptly and appropriately addressed.

(12) That a sponsor representative other than the local coordinator who recruited, screened and selected the host family visit the exchange student/host family home within the first or second month following the student's placement in the home.

(13) Maintain, at a minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the host family. At least once during the fall semester and at least once during the spring semester, ( *i.e.* , twice during the academic year) the contact by the local coordinator with the host family must be in person. All other contacts may take place in person, on the phone, or via electronic mail and must be properly documented. The sponsor is responsible for ensuring the issues raised through such contacts are promptly and appropriately addressed.

(14) That host schools are provided contact information for the local organizational representative (including name, direct phone number, and e-mail address), the program sponsor, and the Department's Office of Designation; and

(15) Adhere to all regulatory provisions set forth in this Part and all additional terms and conditions governing program administration that the Department may impose.

(e) *Student selection.* In addition to satisfying the requirements of § 62.10(a), sponsors must ensure that all participants in a designated secondary school student exchange visitor program:

(1) Are secondary school students in their home countries who have not completed more than 11 years of primary and secondary study, exclusive of kindergarten; or are at least 15 years of age, but not more than 18 years and six months of age as of the program start date;

(2) Demonstrate maturity, good character, and scholastic aptitude; and

(3) Have not previously participated in an academic year or semester secondary school student exchange program in the United States or attended school in the United States in either F-1 or J-1 visa status.

(f) *Student enrollment.* (1) Sponsors must secure prior written acceptance for the enrollment of any exchange student in a United States public or private secondary school. Such prior acceptance must:

(i) Be secured from the school principal or other authorized school administrator of the school or school system that the exchange student will attend; and

(ii) Include written arrangements concerning the payment of tuition or waiver thereof if applicable.

(2) Under no circumstance may a sponsor facilitate the entry into the United States of an exchange student for whom a written school placement has not been secured.

(3) Under no circumstance may a sponsor charge a student private school tuition if such arrangements are not finalized in writing prior to the issuance of Form DS-2019.

(4) Sponsors must maintain copies of all written acceptances for a minimum of three years and make such documents available for Department of State inspection upon request.

(5) Sponsors must provide the school with a translated "written English language summary" of the exchange student's complete academic course work prior to commencement of school, in addition to any additional documents the school may require. Sponsors must inform the prospective host school of any student who has completed secondary school in his/her home country.

(6) Sponsors may not facilitate the enrollment of more than five exchange students in one school unless the school itself has requested, in writing, the placement of more than five students from the sponsor.

(7) Upon issuance of a Form DS-2019 to a prospective participant, the sponsor accepts full responsibility for securing a school and host family placement for the student, except in cases of voluntary student withdrawal or visa denial.

(g) *Student orientation.* In addition to the orientation requirements set forth at § 62.10, all sponsors must provide exchange students, prior to their departure from their home countries, with the following information:

(1) A summary of all operating procedures, rules, and regulations governing student participation in the exchange visitor program along with a detailed summary of travel arrangements;

(2) A copy of the Department's welcome letter to exchange students;

(3) Age and language appropriate information on how to identify and report sexual abuse or exploitation;

(4) A detailed profile of the host family with whom the exchange student will be placed. The profile must state whether the host family is either a permanent placement or a temporary-arrival family;

(5) A detailed profile of the school and community in which the exchange student will be placed. The profile must state whether the student will pay tuition; and

(6) An identification card, that lists the exchange student's name, United States host family placement address and telephone numbers (landline and cellular), sponsor name and main office and emergency telephone numbers, name and telephone numbers (landline and cellular) of the local coordinator and area representative, the telephone number of Department's Office of Designation, and the Secondary School Student program toll free emergency telephone number. The identification card must also contain the name of the health insurance provider and policy number. Such cards must be corrected, reprinted, and reissued to the student if changes in contact information occur due to a change in the student's placement.

(h) *Student extra-curricular activities.* Exchange students may participate in school sanctioned and sponsored extra-curricular activities, including athletics, if such participation is:

(1) Authorized by the local school district in which the student is enrolled; and

(2) Authorized by the state authority responsible for determination of athletic eligibility, if applicable. Sponsors shall not knowingly be party to a placement (inclusive of direct placements) based on athletic abilities, whether initiated by a student, a natural or host family, a school, or any other interested party.

(3) Any placement in which either the student or the sending organization in the foreign country is party to an arrangement with any other party, including receiving school personnel, whereby the student will attend a particular school or live with a particular host family must be reported to the particular school and the National Federation of State High School Associations prior to the first day of classes.

(i) *Student employment.* Exchange students may not be employed on either a full or part-time basis but may accept sporadic or intermittent employment such as babysitting or yard work.

(j) *Host family application and selection.* Sponsors must adequately screen and select all potential host families and at a minimum must:

(1) Provide potential host families with a detailed summary of the Exchange Visitor Program and of their requirements, obligations and commitment to host;

(2) Utilize a standard application form developed by the sponsor that includes, at a minimum, all data fields provided in Appendix F, "Information to be Collected on Secondary School Student Host Family Applications". The form must include a statement stating that: "The income data collected will be used solely for the purposes of determining that the basic needs of the exchange student can be met, including three quality meals and transportation to and from school activities." Such application form must be signed and dated at the time of application by all potential host family applicants. The host family application must be designed to provide a detailed summary and profile of the host family, the physical home environment (to include photographs of the host family home's exterior and grounds, kitchen, student's bedroom, bathroom, and family or living room), family composition, and community environment. Exchange students are not permitted to reside with their relatives.

(3) Conduct an in-person interview with all family members residing in the home where the student will be living;

(4) Ensure that the host family is capable of providing a comfortable and nurturing home environment and that the home is clean and sanitary; that the exchange student's bedroom contains a separate bed for the student that is neither convertible nor inflatable in nature; and that the student has adequate storage space for clothes and personal belongings, reasonable access to bathroom facilities, study space if not otherwise available in the house and reasonable, unimpeded access to the outside of the house in the event of a fire or similar emergency. An exchange student may share a bedroom, but with no more than one other individual of the same sex.

(5) Ensure that the host family has a good reputation and character by securing two personal references from within the community from individuals who are not relatives of the potential host family or representatives of the sponsor ( *i.e.* , field staff or volunteers), attesting to the host family's good reputation and character;

(6) Ensure that the host family has adequate financial resources to undertake hosting obligations and is not receiving needs-based government subsidies for food or housing;

(7) Verify that each member of the host family household 18 years of age and older, as well as any new adult member added to the household, or any member of the host family household who will turn eighteen years of age during the exchange student's stay in that household, has undergone a criminal background check (which must include a search of the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Registry);

(8) Maintain a record of all documentation on a student's exchange program, including but not limited to application forms, background checks, evaluations, and interviews, for all selected host families for a period of three years following program completion; and

(9) Ensure that a potential single adult host parent without a child in the home undergoes a secondary level review by an organizational representative other than the individual who recruited and selected the applicant. Such secondary review should include demonstrated evidence of the individual's friends or family who can provide an additional support network for the exchange student and evidence of the individual's ties to his/her community. Both the

exchange student and his or her natural parents must agree in writing in advance of the student's placement with a single adult host parent without a child in the home.

(k) *Host family orientation.* In addition to the orientation requirements set forth in § 62.10, sponsors must:

(1) Inform all host families of the philosophy, rules, and regulations governing the sponsor's exchange visitor program, including examples of "best practices" developed by the exchange community;

(2) Provide all selected host families with a copy of the Department's letter of appreciation to host families;

(3) Provide all selected host families with a copy of Department of State-promulgated Exchange Visitor Program regulations;

(4) Advise all selected host families of strategies for cross-cultural interaction and conduct workshops to familiarize host families with cultural differences and practices; and

(5) Advise host families of their responsibility to inform the sponsor of any and all material changes in the status of the host family or student, including, but not limited to, changes in address, finances, employment and criminal arrests.

(l) *Host family placement.* (1) Sponsors must secure, prior to the student's departure from his or her home country, a permanent or arrival host family placement for each exchange student participant. Sponsors may not:

(i) Facilitate the entry into the United States of an exchange student for whom a host family placement has not been secured;

(ii) Place more than one exchange student with a host family without the express prior written consent of the host family, the natural parents, and the students being placed. Under no circumstance may more than two exchange students be placed with a host family, or in the home of a local coordinator, regional coordinator, or volunteer. Sponsors may not place students from the same countries or with the same native languages in a single home.

(2) Prior to the student's departure from his or her home country, sponsors must advise both the exchange student and host family, in writing, of the respective family compositions and backgrounds of each, whether the host family placement is a permanent or arrival placement, and facilitate and encourage the exchange of correspondence between the two.

(3) In the event of unforeseen circumstances that necessitate a change of host family placement, the sponsor must document the reason(s) necessitating such change and provide the Department of State with an annual statistical summary reflecting the number and reason(s) for such change in host family placement in the program's annual report.