



Reflections
International, Inc.
EXCHANGE STUDENT PROGRAM

HOST FAMILY HANDBOOK

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Dear Host Family,

I would like to extend a warm welcome to you, as new members of the Reflections International family of hosts.

I believe you'll find that opening your home to a foreign student will be a rewarding experience which will change your life in a very positive way.

Now that you have made the decision to add a new member to your family for a while, you may be wondering what to expect.

On the following pages we have put together guidelines which we hope will cover many typical situations. If you have questions pertaining to what is in this pamphlet, or about anything else, please don't hesitate to call us at (608) 583-2412.

We'll check in with you once a month to find out how things are going, but we are *always* ready to assist you and hope you will *feel free* to contact us *any time* questions or problems arise.

We look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,



Hartmut Weithe
President
Reflections International, Inc.

When Your Student Arrives



The students arrive in Chicago. A representative of Reflections International will meet them there and bring them to Wisconsin, where you will meet them at a previously arranged location to take them to your home. A question that arises right away is: what would you like your student to call you - mom, dad, or your name? A small matter, but it should be addressed so as to avoid any awkwardness right at the outset. And remember, your student has just spent a long time traveling and is probably excited and exhausted and confused. What the student needs most now is a friendly reception and lots of sleep.

There is a seven hour time difference between central Europe and the Midwest, which means your student will be suffering from *jet lag* for a while. Jet lag does not just mean that the body has to catch up with lost sleep. It means that it takes the body a while to adapt its rhythm to, in this case, a seven-hour time difference. That process may take a few days or a few weeks, as everybody is different.

Orientation

After the students' arrival, before they go home with their host families, Reflections International organizes a group orientation meeting to prepare the students for what is to come.

Before returning home at the end of the school year the students will be required to attend another orientation meeting where they will discuss issues relating to the transition back to their own culture in order to prepare them for their return to Europe.

Culture Shock

You can imagine that moving in with a new family in a foreign country will take some adjusting. It is an overwhelming experience to be in a situation where everything and everybody is new, and you have to express yourself in a borrowed language. Your student is young and energetic, and well equipped to deal with such a situation, but this adjustment requires a lot of energy, and eventually exhaustion will set in. It is hard psychologically to feel yourself to be an outsider all the time, even if everybody around you is welcoming and friendly. After all, these kids have left behind everything that was familiar in their lives; their daily routines, their friends, their family, and their language.

As well as they may speak English, they almost certainly cannot express themselves as intelligently as they can in their native tongue. Very often they will feel that they appear stupid, and that they are the only ones who know they are not. They are in a situation in which they have to discover their own inner strengths in order to survive, a process that may take a while. While that process is going on they may very well become depressed, irritable, withdrawn, or critical of their adopted surroundings. You can help them by being consistently kind, understanding, and supportive. Encourage them to be outgoing and active in school, sports, community activities and the like, and in time things will turn around. It is not uncommon for Christmastime to mark a low point in their adjustment cycle. The excitement, the newness of everything has worn off, and Christmas is an emotionally charged time of the year anyway when the student might feel especially lonely, remembering all the wonderful Christmases at home. Now it is your task to be extra sympathetic and kind. Usually things will turn around in January or February. By the time the school year comes to an end, you will really have won a new member of your family who may not want to leave. And *you* will hate to say good-bye, too. Students who have returned after a year abroad are frequently heard to say "This was the best year of my life." And much of the credit goes to you!

Living Together

Remember that the students do not come here as tourists. The purpose of their stay is to become immersed in a new culture, and to experience it from the inside by sharing daily life in an American home. So please welcome the student as a member of your family, not as a guest.

The most important thing for you as a host family is to provide a warm and loving environment, and then it will be possible to solve any problems, should they arise. One possible area of conflict is sibling rivalry. As a new arrival your European son or daughter will be the center of attention for a while, which might make their American brothers or sisters a little jealous. That is quite normal and will often remedy itself with very little intervention on your part.

In any situation where conflict persists we encourage you to have an open and honest discussion of the issues. Be clear about what you think about the matter, and encourage the student to articulate his or her point of view. Many problems turn out to be just misunderstandings, and with good will and common sense it should be possible to work out a solution. And remember that you, the hosts, as well as the student, are encouraged to turn to us at Reflections International any time for help. We are just a phone call away from you.

Your student will be quite fluent in English, but remember that it can be difficult at times to express yourself in a foreign language, and an even greater difficulty, especially at the beginning, is understanding the native speakers. For simply practical reasons it is virtually impossible for the student to ask for clarification every time he or she does not understand what is said, so there will be many times when you think the student understood you when he or she really did not. Naturally, this may lead to misunderstandings. Try to be sensitive to these possibilities, and as time goes on these difficulties will diminish as the student's ability to speak and understand English will improve.

Remember that you are acting as the student's parents while they live in your home, and as such you have the final authority to decide what they may or may not do. Make it clear from the start what your expectations and house rules are, so the student does not have to find out by trial and error, which could result in problems. In some respects, teenagers in Europe have greater freedom than their counterparts in the USA. You should let them know what the rules here are, and that they have to be obeyed. Curfews come to mind, which don't exist in Germany, or the fact that alcohol and tobacco are strictly forbidden here. The students are required to ask your approval for all activities, and to let you know at any given time, where they are and with whom. As for all rules and regulations concerning the students, please refer to the section on rules.

Living Arrangements

It is not required that you provide your student with a room of his or her own. We do require, though, that the student have his or her own bed. If she or he shares a room it has to be with another teenager of the same sex.

As the student is to be considered a family member rather than a guest, it follows that he or she participates in the household like any other family member. If your own children are expected to do chores, like doing the dishes, making their own bed, taking out the garbage, etc., your exchange student is expected to share in those chores. Babysitting for younger siblings is acceptable on a restricted basis, but remember, the student's time in this country is limited and valuable, and should be used first and foremost to explore American culture. The students are not allowed to take on regular work in this country (their visa status forbids that), but they are allowed to take small occasional jobs like babysitting or snow shoveling to supplement their income.

School

Reflections International will make the arrangements for your student's attendance at the local high school. The students are expected to take school seriously, even though they may not receive credit for their school work in the U.S. when they return to their native country. Reflections International students are required to maintain at least a C average grade level. At the same time they are not expected to make academic achievement their most important goal. They have to find the balance between the time needed to achieve success in school, and finding time to explore other aspects of American culture. It is advisable to stay in close contact with the guidance counselor who is responsible for your student.

Social Life

General

In school students can participate in a variety of extracurricular activities which offer a chance to meet new people and make new friends. Encourage your student to take advantage of these opportunities, and to be outgoing and sociable. As most of your student's friends will be 16 and older, many of them will have driver's licenses, and will naturally take care of many of your student's transportation needs.

Dating

Falling in love is difficult to regulate. Nevertheless, serious involvement with only one person is discouraged, as during their year in America the students should widen their horizons as much as possible, rather than narrow their focus and have a relationship with just one person.

Traveling

Please refer to the section on rules to learn about the details governing travel.

Reflections International welcomes trips by the student taken with the host family.

For trips exceeding a few days, and for trips outside the Continental



United States Reflections International needs to be provided with a travel itinerary prior to departure. If traveling outside the U.S., make sure the student carries his or her passport and DS 2019-form, and that his or

her visa permits multiple entries into the United States. Reflections International offers a variety of optional trips throughout the school year. Many of these are also open to the host family's natural children, if they wish to participate.

Financial Matters



Bank Account

It is strongly recommended that your student have his or her own bank account. It should be a savings account rather than a checking account, as savings accounts are usually free of charge for persons under 18 years of age, and no adult needs to co-sign.

Contact your local bank for details. The host family and the

student are not to open a joint account.

Allowance

Spending money is the responsibility of the student, not the host family. Reflections International has discussed this topic with the student and the natural parents during the interview in Germany or Switzerland, and it is up to the student and his or her parents, how much spending money they consider adequate, and what arrangements to make for money transfer.

Who Pays For What?

Financially, you as the host family are only responsible for food and lodging, including a lunch to take to school. If the student prefers to buy lunch at school, this is considered an extra expense and comes out of the student's spending money. If your family eats in a restaurant, exchange students are expected to pay for themselves. The same goes for entertainment such as movie or theater tickets, and long distance telephone calls.

Your student may be tempted to make telephone calls to his or her natural parents. In general these should be discouraged, because they are expensive, and have to be paid for by the student, but also because the easy reach for the phone can delay the necessary process of integration, which sometimes requires some effort. Letter writing, however, is to be encouraged, as it fosters thought and reflection on what is going on in the student's life.

Insurance

Reflections International provides the student with health insurance, accident insurance, liability insurance, and traveling insurance. The student has an insurance card showing the policy number. If your student receives any medical treatment, he or she has to fill out an insurance claim form (available from the insurance company or Reflections International) and submit it to the medical provider, who will submit the bill directly to the insurance company. The natural parents or legal guardians of your student have signed a release permitting medical care to be administered, which you will find on page 4 of the student's Certificate of Health.

Church and Religion

Exchange students may choose to either participate or not participate in the host family's religious activities, seek out a church of their own, or not attend religious services at all. However, Reflections International encourages the students to participate in the host family's activities, as religion constitutes an important part of American life, and so is a part of the culture that should be explored. Furthermore it offers another avenue for social contacts.

Rules

The student and the student's natural parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s) agree to comply with the following rules while participating in the Reflections International (henceforth referred to as 'Reflections International' or 'RI') Exchange Student Program. Participation begins with boarding the flight to the host country and ends with leaving the return flight to the home country. In the case of violation of some or all of these rules RI reserves the right to return the student to their home country prematurely.

1. The student is obligated to behave in an honest and trustworthy manner, as the host - student relationship is based largely on trust. A severe violation of trust by the student (which includes, but is not limited to, violating these *Binding Rules*) gives RI the right to end the student's stay prematurely due to breach of contract.
2. Regular high school attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to put forth their best effort and conform to the standards of achievement designated by the school in which they are enrolled. In addition RI requires that they maintain a "C" average grade level and that they pass every class. A single failing grade ("F") on a report card, regardless of the grade point average, constitutes a breach of contract and may result in the student being sent back to his/her home country.
3. Athletic eligibility or participation is not guaranteed.
4. The student agrees to live by the host family's rules and to do his/her best to become integrated into the life of the host family, and to participate fully in the hosts' family life. At all times the host family must be informed and has to approve of the student's activities, whereabouts, and companions.

5. All local, state and federal laws must be obeyed.
6. Should problems arise between the student and the host family, the student shall not bring these problems to the attention of people outside the family. The first step to a solution is communication, a conversation between student and hosts in order to clarify what the problems are, and then to try to come to a solution. Should the student alone not be able to solve the problems with the hosts, he/she is obligated to contact his *Reflections International* representative who will then assist him/her until a solution to the problems has been found.
7. Students participating in an RI program are not allowed to buy and/or consume alcoholic beverages and tobacco products.
8. Students must not buy, use, own or sell illegal substances, illegal drugs or drug paraphernalia (see also rule #5), or associate with anyone involved with illegal substances in any way. If there is reasonable cause to suspect that the student has consumed illegal substances, RI can demand that the student be given a drug test. Refusal to submit to a drug test will be taken as an admission of guilt and automatically lead to the student's being sent back to the home country immediately due to breach of contract.
9. Driving of cars or motorcycles while participating in the RI program is not allowed, even if the student has a valid driver's license. Wisconsin law makes it impossible for exchange students to obtain a driver's license.
10. Students are not allowed to own, rent or lease a car, motorcycle or moped, or to have another person buy, rent or lease a car, motorcycle or moped for them.
11. Students may not travel by themselves or with other teenagers. However, travel outside the local area with the host parents or an adult person or a group approved by the host parents and RI is permitted. Students may travel alone to visit a relative residing in the USA provided they obtain written permission from their natural parents, a written

invitation from the relatives they intend to visit, and the consent of the host family and RI.

12. While they are participating in the RI Exchange Student Program the students must not visit their home country except in the case of an emergency as, for example, a death in the family. Permission by RI is required.
13. If the student wants to participate in potentially dangerous activities like hunting, bungee jumping, hang gliding, participating in driver's education etc., he or she has to obtain written permission from the natural parents and the consent of the host parents.
14. Hitchhiking is prohibited.
15. Students are not allowed to work outside the home, with the exception of jobs like babysitting, lawn mowing etc.
16. RI does **not** accept students who smoke, smoking is prohibited for RI students.
17. RI students are not allowed to have sexual relations. Far-reaching life decisions, e.g. marriage, engagement to be married, tattoos, change of religious affiliation, etc. are forbidden to the student while he/she is participating in the RI exchange program.
18. Siblings, friends and relatives are not allowed to visit the exchange student while he/she is enrolled in the program, and RI strongly discourages even the natural parents from visiting during the exchange year. If the parents must visit, they should do so at the end of the student's stay.
19. The students must enter and, at the end of their stay, leave the country according to the travel arrangements made by RI.
20. Students are required to establish a bank account separate from that of their host family. The students are not allowed to borrow money from their host family.

In addition to the foregoing, the student and the natural parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s) release Reflections International, Inc. (henceforth referred to as "Reflections International" or "RI") and the student's host family regarding the following:

1. Medical Costs

Any medical expenses incurred shall be the responsibility of the student, his or her natural parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s).

2. Personal Property

The student's personal property is exclusively his or her responsibility. Neither RI nor the host family are liable for any property or money which is lost or stolen.

3. Liability

Any liability resulting from the student's activities, be it damage or destruction of property or injury to persons, shall be the responsibility of the student, his/her natural parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s).