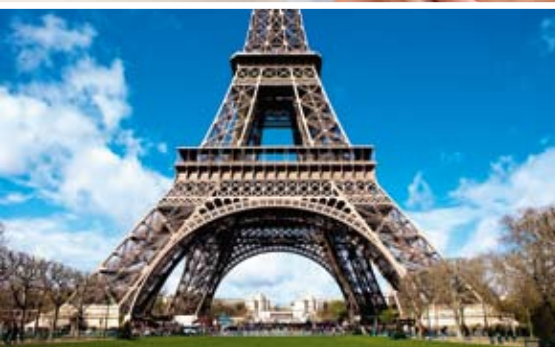




STS HIGH SCHOOL HOST FAMILY HANDBOOK





WELCOME TO STS HIGH SCHOOL

Dear Host Family,

We at STS would like to welcome your family to our ever-growing international community. Your interest in hosting a young person from another part of the world is one shared by thousands of families across the world. Without leaving your home, your family is about to learn more about another culture first hand and leave a life long impression on your special visitor. On a larger scale, your family, exchange student, and broader community are about to make an important step towards greater tolerance and understanding between nations.

STS has prepared this handbook especially for host families. It's intended to help you get ready for your new role as host parents and to answer some questions about STS and your anticipated exchange student.

Thank you very much for opening your home to one of our students! We look forward to keeping in touch with you during the upcoming school year and supporting you in any way we can.

STS High School





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"In July 1985 our youngest son went to Denmark on exchange for one year and life changed completely for our family. Our son's room was soon occupied by our first Scandinavian exchange student. It was most successful. Our son returned more wise and mature and our family continued to grow each year. We have now hosted 24 students. We have loved every student. Each one has been an individual and we have had such wonderful experiences with so many different personalities. Most of them still keep in touch with letters and postcards.

Many of our students' parents have become our good friends too. Now there are two "host grand children" and with such an extended family we look forward to many more. Our lives certainly took a new direction when we became a host family. We have shared so much with so many teenagers from the other side of the world and we will always remember each and every one of them."

Val and Alf
STS host family in Australia



THIS IS STS STUDENT TRAVEL SCHOOLS

RESPONSIBILITY, SAFETY AND QUALITY

STS Started in 1958 as a Swedish company. Today, over 50 years later, STS has evolved into a multinational group with a network of more than 15000 staff members, part-time teachers, representatives and volunteers working all around the world.

Since the first students departed in 1958, STS has focused on international exchange and language programs abroad. Though the core mission has not changed, the values and programs have constantly developed through the years based on gained experience and the evolution of a more global society.

All programs offered by STS encourage broadening of global perspectives, developing language skills, fostering a clearer understanding of diverse cultures, and an open and enriching exchange of ideas, values, and beliefs.

Throughout our programs, our interest is in providing high quality experience for the students, host families, host communities and educators, regardless where they are from or which STS program they join in the world.

Our main focus is on having satisfied customers. This is why we continually work on product development and always aim to achieve the highest quality possible.

The founder of STS, Mr. Lars Magnusson, was early to recognise the importance of second language training and international experience. In 1958 he began to offer language courses for Scandinavian students in the the UK and the idea for STS was born. Since then STS has sent over a million students around the world on various educational programs and is today established on all continents, with over 20 offices and a number of partner organisations all over the world.

STS offers attractive study and travel options for every age group, resulting in long term customers. Many members of our staff have worked within the organisation for years and possess invaluable knowledge. Our motivated and competent staff became our first asset and have allowed us to offer high quality educational programs throughout the years.

"My year in Italy couldn't have been any better. The culture, food, places, people, language, and adventures are all memories that will last me for a life time! At the end of the year my host sister actually flew back with me to Canada for a visit. It is now one of my favorite countries and I am already planning for a return visit."

Kristine on exchange in Italy



STS offers a wide range of international programs for all age groups and is accredited by various official organisations related to international education and student exchange.

STS Language Travel

STS Language Travel offers students aged 10–18 a wide range of language courses in England, Malta, France, Austria, USA, Australia, Canada, Japan and China. STS provides quality language courses in combination with a fun activity program with many optional excursions. STS also offers language courses in combination with a specific interest for example "STS Chelsea Football Camp", Golf Camp, Horse Back Riding, Pop Idol or other sports activities.

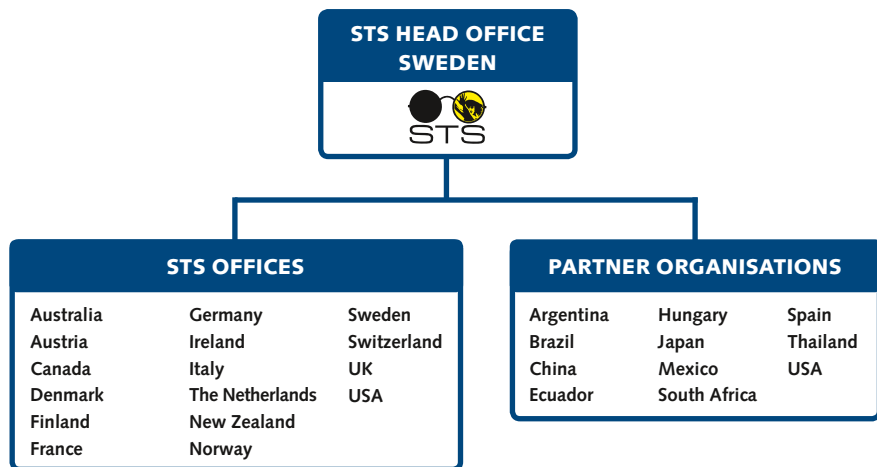
High School Exchange

STS High School is a global exchange program where teenagers can go to another country, live

in a host family and attend a local high school for a semester or a school year. STS offers the following countries for high school exchange: the Australia, Austria, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, UK, and USA. The students return home fluent in a new language, knowing another culture and having met a lot of new friends and memories to last a lifetime.

More products offered:

- STS International Language Schools (for students over the age of 17).
- STS Au Pair (18–26).
- IBS International Business School (18–30).
- STS University and College placements.
- STS Alpresor (ski tour operator), Hotel Salzburger Hof in Bad Gastein, Austria.



STS HIGH SCHOOL

STS High School places high school students aged 15–18 with host families and in high schools for an academic year, semester or short stay programs. This according to the standards set out in each exchange program country. The students live with host families and attend local high schools as full time students.

Only students who show academic interest and achievement, good character, adaptability and a satisfactory command of the English language are accepted. For certain countries there are additional language requirements. STS welcomes students from all over the world and this results in a wonderful international mix in all our programs.

STS Foundation, USA, has been recognised since 1986 by the United States Department of State as an exchange program sponsor and is designated to issue the DS-2019 visa application form to its international students. Students use the DS-2019 visa application to apply for a J-1 exchange visitor visa at the U.S. Embassy in their home country. STS has since gained the same status in many countries.

The Department of State is the sponsor of the J-1 exchange-visitor visa, and allocates the DS-2019 visa application form to designated organisations. The DS-2019 visa application form is completed in the STS Foundation office and then sent to the overseas affiliate who for-

ward them to the students (together with visa instructions). With this completed form for the J-1 visa, the students then petition at their local embassies, that allow them into the USA to study for up to one year.

STS is accepted for listing in the Advisory List of International Education Travel and Exchange Programs, published by the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET). CSIET is a private, not-for-profit organisation committed to establishing standards for international educational travel, providing a system of evaluating programs in terms of these standards, and monitoring compliance with the standards. In addition, CSIET provides information about organisations operating international educational travel and exchange programs at the high school level to schools, communities and educational groups in the USA.

STS is also recognised as a high school exchange organisation and accepts students into:

- Argentina
- Australia
- Austria
- Brazil
- Canada
- China
- Denmark
- Ecuador
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Japan
- Mexico
- The Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Norway
- South Africa
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Thailand
- UK
- USA



HOSTING AN STS STUDENT

Hosting an exchange student is a way of personalising international relations. It provides a means for people of different cultural backgrounds to interact on a day-to-day basis, working out everyday situations that people everywhere have to deal with. Through your participation in the STS program as a host family, you will be contributing to this process by allowing a student from another country to take an active part in your family.

Being part of your family provides an exchange student with an intimate picture of family life in a foreign country. It is an inside view of your family relationships, your workdays, your diverse cultural history, and how you spend your leisure time. In exchange, we hope that your family will grow to understand your student's cultural background.

What you are about to undertake is important work – the building of lasting bridges between nations and their people. As a host family during the coming school year, you are an ambassador for your country. After the student returns home and hears media reports about your country, he or she will no longer think of a stereotypical native. He or she will think of you! For the student, you and your family represent your country.

The experiences with your student will include a mixture of many emotions – hilarity, tenderness,

frustration and even deep sadness. However, they will always be enriching for all of you.

HOST FAMILY CRITERIAS

There is no such thing as a “typical” or “perfect” host family, though the STS families are chosen very carefully. Due to the diversity of the host families we need to demand great flexibility from our students and their natural parents. Below there are some criterias each of our placing organisation strive for when finding host families.

All host families should meet the following criterias:

- All family members should be in good health.
- The main language in the country must be the primary language spoken in the family's home.
- The student must be provided with his or her own bed. If a room is to be shared it should be with a family member of the same sex and age – preferably with no more than 5 years age difference between the student and the host sibling.
- The student should have adequate space to study in the home.
- The decision of hosting a student should be one of consensus among family members.
- Families must not consume excessive amounts of alcohol, or tolerate the abuse of alcohol or drugs among their children or other young people.



- Families must express religious tolerance and should respect the student's choice to participate in their religious activities or not.
- Families should be financially stable and solvent with an acceptable and comfortable standard of living.
- The family's home should be neat and reasonably clean and should have sufficient space for an additional family member.

The area representative screening host families should always ask himself or herself: "Would I want my own child to spend a year abroad with this particular family?" If the answer is yes, the family will likely provide a positive environment for the foreign student.

After having screened the host family, the area representative or the regional coordinator should be able to sign below statements:

1. The host family is capable of providing a comfortable and nurturing home environment.
2. The host family has a good reputation, and character references and criminal background are checked.
3. The host family has adequate financial resources to undertake hosting obligations.

Careful selection of host families is the best way to ensure a positive exchange and a smooth program for everyone involved.

WHERE ARE THE STUDENTS PLACED?

There are many sources for host families in every community, large or small. Over half of all placements are made through personal contacts. Friends and neighbours of STS field staff often host or can be of great assistance

in recommending other families. The area representatives also find potential host families through community service organisations, churches, sports clubs, youth groups, foreign language classes, advertising, families who have sent their own children on exchange etc.

Most host families live in small towns across the host country. STS rarely places students in large cities. The majority of the students are placed in small towns and rural areas where host families are more likely to have the time and living space to host a student. These small communities represent what many people have coined

"We first became an STS host family after reading about it in our son's school newsletter. Now five years and six new family members later we have really discovered what a rewarding experience hosting can be.

We have extended our knowledge and enjoyment of our own local area and Australia in general. We have gained immediate knowledge of not one but several other countries and cultures and we have given our one and only son the opportunity to learn and grow by having "brothers" and "sisters". What we have truly gained from this experience, however, is the ultimate extended family and a cornucopia of wonderful memories.

If your family is important to you, becoming a host family adds a whole new, enjoy able dimension to its meaning."

Alan, Winsome and Jeremy
STS host family in Australia



“the real program country” as this is primarily where the middle class population lives. Unlike some families in big cities, small town families enjoy safe communities, good schools, excellent health and community services, caring neighbours and affordable homes.

Over the years, the structure of the family has changed. Nowadays, it is common for exchange students to be placed in homes with single parents, stepmothers, stepbrothers, half-sisters, gay parents etc. Less traditional families do not equal less quality placements. Students are prepared to accept placement in a variety of different family structures.

Double placement

Occasionally, host families request to host two STS students. In these situations, students must be of different nationalities, speak different languages and agree to the double placement in order for the placement to be confirmed. While English (or the language spoken in the program country) must be the first language spoken in the home, this does not preclude the fact that many families are from varied ethnic backgrounds.

In addition, families of all religious backgrounds can be found in every community. Many families attend church and identify themselves with a particular religion. STS suggests that the students participate in their host family's religious practices at least once during their stay, in order to experience that segment of family life. However, the area representatives ensure that no student is forced to attend religious services and that families are not motivated to host by the intention to convert students.

BEING A HOST FAMILY

In a short while you will have a new family member living in your home. Your student will look to you for understanding, direction, and an orientation to the routines of your daily life. Accepting a total stranger into your home will mean adjustments for everyone in the family and probably take some time getting used to.

The student/host family relationship is the key to a successful exchange experience. Family responsibilities and privileges must be the same for your exchange student as they are for your own daughter or son of the same age. We at STS urge you to treat your new teenager not as a guest, but as a new family member.

Exchange students may be representatives of the teenage culture in a particular country, but they are just like teens all over the world. They are exploring the limits of their family and social relations, as well as testing values and beliefs. Much like your own children, your exchange student will be very independent at times, yet reach out for your support and guidance at other times. There will be instances when a firm position is required, but more often, all that will be necessary is your love and support.

While you wait for your student to arrive, you should have a new awareness for your student's home country. Find out as much as you can! Some ideas your whole family might enjoy are:

- Travel videos. Try your local library.
- National Geographic Magazine. Many libraries have hard back copies; look up your specific country.
- The internet and books.



- A wall map of the world, and/or your student's country.
- Cookbooks and food.
- Music and dance.
- Travel shows on TV, especially PBS and the Discovery channels.
- Sports.
- If you do not have children, or your children are young, you might want to know more about being the parent of a teenager. Your high school or local hospital may offer some free or inexpensive classes, or literature.

STUDENT ARRIVAL

Hopefully, you have sent several letters or e-mails and photos to your exchange student and his or her natural parents by the time the student arrives. That way you and the student don't feel like total strangers and the natural parents aren't quite as concerned about who is looking after their child!

At the airport

The STS offices in the students' home countries arrange all flights. If you have a special request for which airport or when the student should arrive, please let us know and we will do what we can to accommodate you. Sometimes a representative from STS will be at the airport with you to meet your student upon their arrival.

Don't be concerned if it takes your student a long time to come through the arrival gate, as he or she will have to go through immigration. Your student might have a student visa that allows them to enter and stay as a student. This visa will probably be a multiple entry visa, allowing them to go on brief trips to the nearby countries and still re-enter. However, you

should always check with STS before going out of your country to make sure your student will be able to get back into the country.

When you meet your exchange student at the airport, anticipate that he or she will be scared, excited, and tired all at the same time. To help your student identify you more easily at the airport, we suggest that you prepare a "Welcome" sign. You may also choose to bring flowers or a small gift for your new family member.

In view of your student's anticipated fatigue, plan a slow and easy pace of activities for the first week to allow for a gradual adjustment. Besides adapting to new food, a new family, a new high school, and a new country, your new teenager might have jetlag and need a few days to adjust. On average, it will take one day to adjust to each 2–3 hours of time change.

At home

Upon the return from the airport, show your student your home; explain sleeping accommodations, how to operate bathroom and kitchen equipment, and where to get a cool drink or a snack. STS does not require that an exchange student has his or her own bedroom, however, the student cannot share a bedroom with another teenager of the opposite sex.

When your student arrives, please ensure that his or her passport and return airline ticket are stored in a safe place. Show the student where these items are to be kept, and be sure he or she is aware that it is not necessary to carry a passport while in your country. A few days later, review your family's routines and rules. Talk openly about what your expectations are



for the student, such as pitching in with household chores. As with most teenagers, these may be areas you will periodically have to reinforce with the student. Do not take the student's understanding or conduct for granted. Explain all expectations in detail to avoid future misunderstandings. Above all, be patient.

It is important to give your new family member some freedom to find his or her own way. You must remember that, even if your student has pre-knowledge in your language, comprehension of your dialect may be initially difficult for him or her. Your student may appear to understand much more than he or she actually does. More than a smile or a nod, behavior will convey whether your intended message has been truly understood. Watch for follow-through by the student, and do not hesitate to correct, as well as

"My husband and I have hosted many times for STS. This is a wonderful experience for both us and our son, who is an only child but now has 14 brothers and sisters from all over the world. We have 2 granddaughters in Sweden now. Hosting has made our family very interested in other parts of the world. Our exchange children give us so much fun and enjoyment. We have had many come back HOME here to visit us 2-3 years after they have left, along with their families. When you host an exchange student you have them in your heart forever and they feel the same. I can only encourage you to try hosting, it has been one of the best experiences we have ever had."

The Conner family,
STS host family in New Zealand

praise when things are done as you had intended. The misunderstanding of even one word by your student can cause a problem as can the student's misuse of a word. Before you take offence at something your student says, make sure he or she understands what he or she was saying! Try writing things down if communication is difficult at first. Many students understand a language written better than spoken. Also, try to avoid jargon or big words. Above all, remember that raising your voice won't make your words more intelligible to your student. Instead, it might make them feel like they're getting in trouble.

Your student will feel welcome and wanted if you ask questions about his or her home country and the family that has been left behind. Ask your student to share stories about home. These may evoke some loneliness at first, but sharing them with you will also bring a sense of pride and uniqueness to the surface. This will enhance the student's sense of confidence in the midst of his or her new home. For most students, it will take a couple of months before they adjust fully to your way-of life.

One of the first concerns of students is knowing what to call their new host "mother" and "father". You can help a great deal in eliminating this anxiety if you immediately tell your student what you wish to be called, whether it be 'Mom' and 'Dad', 'Aunt and Uncle' or just using your first names. Students are always relieved when this is made clear.

STS recommends that you write to your student's natural family, thus allowing you to know them better. In so doing you will establish a friendship with an entire family. This letter will also go a long



way in helping your student's family feel at ease with their decision to trust their child's welfare to another family. The more they know about you, the more confident they will feel. Let them know about your family and how their child is adjusting. Include photos so that they can picture the life their child is living in your home.

In the community

After the jetlag has worn off, you should start introducing your student to your community. It would be nice if you could take him or her into the school to meet the guidance counselor and to choose courses. Show them around the school so they don't get lost on their first day. You may ask the guidance counselor to arrange for your student to have a 'buddy' who will show your student the school, introduce your student to people, and help your student get involved in activities.

It would also be great if you could give your student a tour of your community. What about showing him or her the post office and explain how letters are mailed. Take your student to the grocery store, the hairdresser, the local mall, and the drugstore. Explain how to call for help in an emergency. Finally, you should take your student to the bank and help him or her set up an account. Explain the withdrawal system and find out how long it will take for money to be wired to your student.

ADJUSTING

Adjusting to a new culture will take time. Both your student and your family will find yourselves making adjustments. Be ready to teach and to learn. Remember, your student is not yet an adult. The first few weeks can be very

stressful for him or her. Try to be patient and understanding, and do your best to keep a sense of humor.

The STS program emphasises family living as the heart of the international learning experience. With the host family as a base, each student is encouraged to take full advantage of the opportunity to participate in all that this new home, school and community have to offer. Students should enroll in local or school-based sports organisations, clubs, musical ensembles and interest groups. In many instances, these opportunities aren't available in their home country, and exchange students are eager to take full advantage of activities while abroad.

Social activities have an important place in the exchange experience of your student. While your new family member is expected to abide by your rules regarding household responsibilities, homework, activities, and curfew, it is important to allow time for a normal teenager's social life. Your concerns about the developing friendships of your exchange student should be exactly the same as those you have for your own children.

While it is important for your student to be socially active, it is reasonable to arrange for his or her schedule to coincide with other demands on the family. To suggest using public transportation or arrange car-pooling and other means of transportation is a viable alternative to frequent requests for chauffeuring in the host family's car. The student can also be encouraged to arrange for his or her own transportation to social events, provided that these plans are shared in advance with the host family. In general, all family rules regarding bedtime, routines for



getting up in the morning, mealtimes, dating and household responsibilities must be clearly understood by the student in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

There is a fairly predictable **cycle of adjustment** for exchange students living in a new country. The cycle is normal and healthy. However, each student is different, and not all students experience all the stages, nor do they experience them in the same order.

1. When the student arrives, everything is exciting, new and interesting.
2. The student becomes accustomed to this new life, and the differences from the home country become more pronounced. The student is no longer a novelty in his or her host family or at school, and realises that he or she is here for the duration of up to a year.
3. The holidays can have a depressing effect on students because 'it isn't like home'.
4. Another sign of culture shock is wanting to spend more time with friends from the home country. Students sometimes become homesick and feel like outsiders, criticising things that only weeks earlier were 'great'.
5. With time, students usually discover things are not so bad after all, and the mood begins to reverse. Gradually, the student becomes less depressed, gains perspective and starts to find things interesting again.
6. The final stage is reached when the student feels that he or she is really part of your family and is completely 'at home' with you, school and new friends. Most students, but not all, do reach this level, resulting in a tearful farewell at the airport when they have to leave their new 'family'.

Most students go through the above phases, varying in intensity from student to student. The changes in language, school, food, home life and even in the weather can combine to cause the student to become frustrated and unhappy – but usually only temporarily. Homesickness and culture shock are very real and can be painful. Your patience, understanding and love can make a significant difference in how your student learns to cope with his or her feelings.

Expectations

Everybody involved in the exchange experience will have certain expectations. There is nothing wrong with having expectations as long as they are realistic and flexible and as long as everyone knows what is expected of them! To avoid any surprises, here are Student Travel Schools' expectations for exchange students, natural parents, host families, and STS personnel and volunteers.

For exchange students

- To attend all classes except when on an STS approved trip or when ill.
- To communicate with host family members and STS representatives.
- To get involved in host family, school, STS, and community activities.
- To be positive and flexible.
- To be good ambassadors for their country.
- To follow the STS rules.

For natural parents

- To ensure their child has enough spending money during the exchange.
- To allow their child and the host family to develop a close relationship.



- To support their child's decision to go abroad by trusting their child and allowing them to be independent.
- To allow their child to adapt and not to interfere in this process by calling or e-mailing too soon or too often.
- To try to understand all sides of a situation if a problem should occur.

For host families

- To treat the student as a family member, not a guest.
- To offer the student support, kindness, and guidance.
- To be patient and understanding in terms of cultural and linguistic adjustment.
- To set up reasonable rules and chores for the student.
- To be flexible in their own routines to accommodate the new family member.
- To communicate with the student and STS.
- To provide room and board to the student voluntarily.

"From day one, Jana fit into our family and participated in many family outings and events. She became an older sister to our daughter Nicola. Jana was very generous with her time and shared a lot of it with our other children. Jana was also fortunate to make many dear friends through school. The day Jana left to go back to Germany, a piece of our family left. Jana knows that she will always have a second home here in Canada. Many thanks to STS for a wonderful experience."

Gillian and Glenn,
STS host family in Canada

For STS & area representatives

- To meet the student at the airport upon their arrival, together with the host family.
- To get the student enrolled in high school.
- To match the student with an appropriate host family.
- To maintain regular contact with the student and host family.
- To arrange orientation meetings for host families and students.
- To help in solving problems as a neutral third party and if necessary to arrange for moving a student.

Culture shock

The dictionary defines culture shock as "a condition of anxiety and disorientation that can affect someone suddenly exposed to a new culture." For your student, anxiety and disorientation may show itself in many ways. Culture shock is a natural response, and it can sneak up on your student. It is unlikely that your student will be aware culture shock is occurring.

Culture shock is not an immediate problem. It often develops after the initial excitement of being in the new country wears off. Symptoms vary from student to student. Your student may show some of the more common symptoms or perhaps, none at all. Keep an eye out for difficulties, because the symptoms of culture shock can be very much like common teenage behavior.

Symptoms of culture shock include:

- Excessive sleeping.
- Frequent, ongoing criticism of the host country, comparison with "better" things at home.



- Weight gain or loss.
- Irritability or anger without good reason.
- Depression, spending a lot of time alone in his or her own room.
- Excessive homesickness.
- Uncommunicative behavior.
- Constant communication with friends and family from the home country.

It will take time for your student to adjust to life abroad and your home. If culture shock does occur, remember it is curable. Your student may not be able to express what he or she is feeling, and may feel the only recourse is to either “lash out” or “clam up”. Your student may think moving to a new host family could solve the problems that he or she is experiencing. Be patient and ask your area representative for help. It is hard not to take this behavior personally, but be assured it does not reflect on you or your family.

Even though your student has heard a lot about what it means to be an exchange student from their friends or relatives, the only way to completely understand life as an exchange student is through the experience itself. While learning to understand and interpret the new culture, your student may make comparisons between your country and his or her home country. Criticism is a common defense mechanism used by exchange students to make themselves feel secure in their living arrangements. By criticizing an event, person, or behavior they can assure themselves that their “way” is correct. Using criticism as a defense mechanism also can mean that the student is afraid and needs to feel better about him or herself, thus reverting to cynicism or sarcasm.

Keeping an open line of communication is crucial in conquering culture shock. Help the student understand his or her emotions. Encourage physical exercise and participation in different activities to distract your student from thinking too much about his or her home country. If your student falls victim, remember that time, along with an open ear from a caring host parent can help reduce the effects of culture shock.

Homesickness

Homesickness is often associated with culture shock. Some students suffer from homesickness, others take to the new life with ease. We are unable to predict which students will overcome homesickness, and which will not, you will have to judge that for yourself. Even though your student may be somewhat prepared to deal with these feelings, you may also need to assist. Involve your student; work together in the yard, take the dog for a walk together, prepare a meal together, etc. Do not allow yourself to feel guilty about your student's unhappiness. If your student continues to be unhappy and depressed long enough for you to be concerned, please contact your area representative for help.

You and your student may be surprised to find that STS discourages phone calls between natural families and students. Phone calls usually make students feel more homesick. Excessive phone calls from your student's natural parents can actually prolong homesickness and culture shock. Encourage your student to limit his or her calls home to once or twice a month. Make your student aware that writing letters and sending post cards are great ways to keep their natural families informed of their activities. If



you find that your student's natural parents call your home excessively, and if you feel they are hindering your student's adjustment to your family, please let us know.

Holiday time can be depressing for your exchange student. Encourage your student to share his or her traditions and customs with your family. Also, keep your student actively involved in your holiday celebration.

Homesickness and culture shock are very real and very painful emotions. They can make your whole family miserable. You can help combat homesickness and culture shock with patience, and understanding.

Cultural differences

As a host family you may find that the most difficult part of the exchange will be resolving cultural differences. Knowing a little about some of these cultural differences may help you identify a misunderstanding before it becomes a problem. Here are some of the differences we hear about most often.

- Some students find it difficult to accept the control and supervision of their host parents. Students may not understand that the new country not always is a safe place, and that it is important you know where they are at all times. You may need to talk together about **why** it is important for you and your family to know where he or she is and with whom. Be sure to express concern, but do not scold. Express your thoughts clearly and openly.
- Standards for sexual behavior vary widely from culture to culture. Talk about how things are here, in your family and community. Some

of our students come from cultures and families where sex is openly discussed; others expect sexuality to be a very private issue. Do let your student know what is acceptable in your home.

- Discipline can also differ from culture to culture. In some countries they slap their young children when they misbehave. For example, Scandinavian students have grown up in a society where striking a child for any reason is against the law. If you have a student from Finland, Sweden, Norway, or Denmark, you may want to talk about differences in disciplining children. Share your family's disciplinary standards with your student and make sure he or she understands all of your house rules.

RULES

All STS student have signed the STS rules before leaving for the exchange. They must follow these rules, no exceptions! Any violation of these rules will result in dismissal from the program.

Some of the most important rules include:

- No drinking or drugs – all involvement including possession will lead to early return to the home country without refund of program fees.
- No driving – unless arranged by the student's high school.
- No smoking.
- To uphold the visa or residential permit the student needs to perform well in school. School attendance is mandatory and the student is expected to maintain a C average.
- Respect and abide by the host family rules.



- According to the visa regulations the student is not allowed to take a paid job during the exchange. However, it is acceptable to take occasional jobs like babysitting, mowing lawns etc.
- Travelling by him or herself self during the program is not permitted.
- Visits from the students natural family can only be accepted at the end of the program.

Family rules

You need to talk about family rules very clearly and openly with your student. Be sure to discuss your daily routine; what time to get up, how much time you can spend in the shower, meal times, household chores, how to take phone messages, etc. Talk about dating and curfews. Tell your student how to get in touch with you at work. That way your student can call you if he or she plans to stay late at school or is going to a friend's house. Many families find that posting a list of basic household chores on the refrigerator helps the student identify his or her responsibilities.

Be clear about your rules regarding computer and telephone time and long distance calls. Give your student guidelines. If you feel he or she is spending too much time on the phone, discuss reducing "phone time" by deciding how much time is reasonable for a phone call, and stick to it. Regarding long distance calls, do not assume your student will volunteer to pay for long distance charges. Be straightforward from the beginning about what you expect. It is easy for a student to be unaware of how expensive those calls home can be. Set clear rules and be sure to inspect the phone bill when it arrives.

Household duties for students

Your new family member should be given household duties and responsibilities consistent with whatever you would expect of your own children. For instance, your student may be responsible for cleaning his or her own room, preparing a school lunch, helping with family meals and even yard work. Usually students are expected to take their lunch to school; however, if a purchased lunch is preferred, your student is responsible for that expense.

Let your student know what you expect. Do not presume that your new family member will pitch in and help. Some of these household duties may not have been familiar responsibilities in his or her home country. Take the time to discuss what you would like done and how you would like it done. Show them the correct method of completing the task. You may need to exercise patience and actually teach them to do the job.

If you have young children, baby-sitting, on a limited basis, is quite acceptable. STS recommends that baby-sitting be limited to once a week. Weekends are for social activities and

"You are the best 'mum' and 'dad' any exchange student could have. You made me feel like your daughter, or better, you made me your daughter. From now on every time I hear or say the words 'Mum' or 'Dad' my mind will cross the ocean and give you the sweetest hug, so every time you feel the wind... that is me hugging you."

Camila on exchange in Australia



baby-sitting should not unreasonably interfere with your student's plans.

Responsibility for doing laundry must also be resolved. Daily routines like getting up in the morning, sharing a bathroom to take showers, and even disposing of a girl's sanitary napkins should not be overlooked. Be aware that your family rules are likely to differ from what your student finds familiar, and it may take the student some time to learn and adjust to all aspects of your family routines.

Sometimes teenagers forget or decide to overlook rules and need to be reminded of them. These activities should be part of a healthy development of a sense of family co-operation and mutual support. It is important to be ever mindful of the fact that the exchange student is probably making a greater adjustment than your family. A good sense of humor and some patience will be required at times.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES AND SOCIAL HABITS

Social activities are an important part of your student's exchange experience. We would like you to encourage your student to make friends. The more involved they become in their school or community, the easier it will be for them to avoid homesickness. We hope you will be as concerned about the developing friendships of your exchange student as you would be about those of your own children.

You may find that your student is accustomed to more freedom than you think wise. Again, explain to your student what is and what is not acceptable in your home. We want you to allow

your student to make friends and do things with them, but this does not mean we expect you to rearrange your family's schedule to suit your student's extracurricular activities. You should not let your student take over your family's life. Be reasonable and firm when dealing with your student's requests. Suggest public transportation or car-pooling to reduce your work load. Once your student reaches the point of arranging his or her own transportation with friends, ask that those plans be shared with you in advance.

THE END OF THE EXCHANGE

Inevitably, and regrettably, your exchange student must return home. This will be a difficult time for all of you, as you must now re-adjust to life the way it was before. But it won't be exactly the way it was before, as everyone will hold special memories and experiences in their heart.

Don't stop communicating your feelings at this time just because those feelings may be negative or painful. It is important for those feelings to be dealt with and for a sense of closure to accompany the good-bye. Nobody wants to leave the airport thinking, "If only I'd said....". Keep in mind that good-bye doesn't have to be forever. You can still keep in touch with your student and indeed, many host families do receive e-mails and cards and even the occasional visit from former exchange students!



THE STS STUDENT

STUDENT QUALIFICATIONS

The STS program is open to international students of high school age. The STS students are carefully selected and meet the following qualifications:

- Minimum grade of "C" in all subjects for the past year; overall "C" for the past three years.
- Agreement to attend classes and maintain passing grades in the high school.
- Maturity, flexibility and adaptability.
- Willingness to participate in host family daily life.
- Willingness to accept placement wherever STS locates a host family and high school in the chosen program country.
- Between 15 and 18 years of age.
- Agreement to abide by the STS Student Rules and all STS regulations and policies.

"Even if all communication in the beginning was conducted through sign language and improvising, I was surprised by the patience my host family had with me. The most important experiences I have with me are that I have learned a new language and have made many new close friends. I am so lucky to have had the opportunity to go on an exchange."

Melissa on exchange in Spain

- Good English language ability. For certain program countries, the student must also have proven knowledge of an additional language.
- Excellent physical and mental health. Allergies, certain medical conditions and special dietary requirements might be subject to refusal of the student into the program. If the student's medical conditions are not documented by a licensed physician, STS has the right to cancel the application.
- STS has the right to cancel an application if the student rejects a placement based on location, family structure, school opportunity or any other unreasonable request.
- The students must be insured during their entire stay in the host country. STS provides the students with a travel insurance from Europ Assistance / Falck TravelCare. All students need to be insured by this insurance or an insurance which the student can demonstrate is equally good.
- If a student fails one or more courses at the end of the academic year immediately preceding his or her participation in the STS program, and, as a result, fails to meet the academic requirement for the STS program, STS reserves the right to deny the student's participation in the program.

Spending time abroad is a challenge for most students. At first, the students may find themselves totally overwhelmed and confused by



"My year in Austria was an experience I will never forget. I would do it all over again if I got the chance to. My host family was great with helping me learn the language. The food in Austria is great. I especially love schnitzel and apple strudel. Skiing in the Alps is amazing! Such great snow. The architecture and all the history in each city is definitely something worth seeing."

Chelsea on exchange in Austria

being surrounded by the new language. Even months into the program, the students will have discouraging days when they feel they haven't progressed in learning the new language, made friends or adjusted to the new culture. Some may even wish to return home because they miss their family and friends. All of these feelings are symptoms of "culture shock" which is a normal part of living in a new country.

The student should be flexible. Things will not be the same in the student's new country as in his or her home country. It is required that the student keeps an open mind to meeting new people, new environments and life styles. It is the experience of the new that is so fascinating when studying abroad. It is very important that the student tries to make the best out of his/her time abroad. The host family should consider the student as a member of the family. It is therefore important that the student can be compliant and is able to adjust to everyday life.

The student should be open-minded, should try to learn and appreciate as much as possible about the different life in the host country. Then the student will return home with lots of valuable experience from the new culture.

It is important that the student practises speaking the new language with friends, family and in school. If the student really puts an effort into practising, he or she will undoubtedly have learned a lot by the time to return home. In school the student represents his or her home country and should therefore act as a good ambassador. It is also important that the student takes the opportunity to show the natural parents that he or she knows how to take care of him or herself and take responsibility.

"I would say, regardless of how much I could have expected, my exchange year has been a thousand times better than I would have dared to wish! Despite, this year has also had its low points. Yes, I have been homesick, but funnily enough not when I would have waited for it. The second wave of homesickness did actually come now, when I had to start to prepare for leaving. It's kind of a period between two countries, I know value and love both nations I am related to so much. I want to go home and meet my friends and first family but I don't want to leave my life and my new self, sort of."

Jannika on exchange in Sweden



THE SCHOOL

Shortly after your new family member arrives, it would be great if you could take the student to the local high school to plan his or her course schedule for the school year. Make an appointment with the high school principal and/or guidance counselor who will oversee the exchange student's academic program. Students are not required to take the most difficult courses offered. However, history, geography, English, and physical education are normally included in an exchange student's course of study.

In addition to these courses, which provide exposure to history and society, exchange students should be encouraged to take subjects they enjoy and can manage well. Many elective courses are available in most high schools that the STS student may find different, interesting and challenging. Art courses, speech, drama, photography, and music are all examples of courses which exchange students may enjoy taking. Participating in club and/or after-school activities will expand your student's general involvement in teenage life.

STS students of appropriate age are not automatically placed in the final grade. Individual high schools establish policy regarding the placement of exchange students, sometimes through testing and evaluation. In addition, official recognition for a year's attendance varies from school to school. Many schools do not allow exchange students to participate in graduation ceremonies unless they fulfill local graduation requirements.

As the host family, you should demonstrate the same interest and concern for the exchange student's studies and behavior as you would for your own children. Close contact with the student's guidance counselor will permit you to follow your student's progress. STS students are expected to be responsible and mature. The student should understand that he or she is a guest in the school and that attitude and performance are important even though credit may not be received for the course work completed.

It is unacceptable for an STS student to be uncooperative or to receive low grades. The exchange student's performance and behavior reflects directly on the STS program. If there is any serious disregard by an exchange student of understood policies, notify your STS area representative.

As with any young person, the success of your exchange student in the school environment is directly related to the interest and support you exhibit. Close contact with the student's guidance counselor and teachers will afford you the opportunity to follow your student's progress and participate fully in his or her chosen activities.



LOCAL SUPPORT

STS is a global organisation with offices in over 20 countries. The STS worldwide staff abides by the same rules, guidelines and procedures set by the Head Office in Sweden. In those countries with no STS office, we are represented by the best exchange organisations. Therefore students have the guarantee to get a high standard of service wherever they go for their STS exchange program. An important part of this service is the local support provided by our dedicated and experienced staff.

AREA REPRESENTATIVE

Shortly after arrival, your student will attend an STS orientation meeting with an STS area representative and possibly other exchange students in the vicinity. This meeting is of great importance as it provides students with an op-

portunity to meet other exchange students and share some of their initial experiences. STS Rules and Regulations are thoroughly discussed, and students can ask questions and become acquainted with their area representative. Your area representative will share his or her contact information with you at that time including their cell phone number.

The area representative is available to assist both the exchange student and the host family. Within a couple of weeks of your student's arrival, the area representative will contact each host family and student to determine if the initial adjustment to each other has been satisfactory. Communication with the exchange student will be maintained throughout the school year on a regular basis. In addition, several gatherings will be scheduled during the year involving the area representative, exchange students and their host families. These functions are intended to serve as a support mechanism for each group and as an opportunity to share common problems and experiences.

While students know they can discuss problems with their host parents, they may encounter a situation that is embarrassing or which they feel might offend their host parents. We encourage students with special concerns to contact their area representative. The STS area representative will always be available to them for consultation and guidance. If as a host par-

"My year in China is a memory I will carry with me for the rest of my life. The culture, people, ways of thinking and language are things you can really only experience in China. To learn Chinese takes a lot of time, but it is a very interesting language and useful considering the development of China. The most important thing is that I feel I have developed and learned more about the world outside of my country."

Henry on exchange in China



ent, you have a problem with your student that you would like to discuss confidentially, or you simply need information, you should not hesitate to call your area representative or the STS office. Should unexpected circumstances arise that require your absence from the community for a brief period, your STS area representative should be notified to assist in making the appropriate arrangements for temporary care of your exchange student.

Please try prevent little things or slight misunderstandings from growing into major problems. We ask that you work closely with your area representative to resolve these minor difficulties early in order to guarantee a fulfilling visit for everyone.

REGIONAL COORDINATOR

If the area representative is unable to help you or the student, you should contact the regional coordinator. All students and host families will get the information on who their regional coordinator is. The duties of a regional coordinator includes: training all area representatives, supporting and overseeing the work of all field staff, problem solving, confirming placements, and reviewing paperwork submitted by the area representative. This person works very closely to the national office.

NATIONAL OFFICE

If you or the student needs further assistance, the national office in the host country should be contacted during office hours. If the call is an emergency and after hours, you or the student should use the emergency numbers given upon arrival. Natural parents should only contact the office in the home country if they have questions.

"We are now hosting our 5th international exchange student. Our family has enjoyed the trials and tribulations of each and every one of these amazing young people. I stand in awe of these youngsters leaving home at such a young age and coming to a foreign land. They adjust to different families, food, and schools. They learn to integrate into our homes, they adjust to rules and regulations, both at home and at school and they learn to eat the Canadian way. School becomes more important to them, and a real source of enjoyment, with each passing month.

Most of our students have adapted to our way of living. They grow to live as Canadians but also as members of our family. They celebrate with us and we with them. They cry when they leave us and Canada and all their new found friends. We grow to know their families and they get to know us. E-mail and facebook makes this so much easier now, than even just a few years ago. And then, the best part, they return back to us for Christmas or summer holidays.

Some are great bakers, some ambitious salad makers, some are consistent at picking up the mail, some are good at drying the dishes, some learned to cut the grass with care and precision, but most important they all learned to make their beds and shovel snow. We will continue to accept these terrific students into our home and lives; and we are richer for having known them."

Norah,
STS host mother in Canada



THIS AND THAT...

TRANSPORTATION AND DRIVING

Transportation to and from school varies with each area of the country. It is ideal when a student can walk or ride a bicycle to school. However, in many cases, it may be necessary for the student to take school buses, public transportation or car-pools.

Driving a car or motorcycle is not permitted. The only exception to this policy is if an exchange student enrolls in a Driver's Education class at school. The only reason a student would be allowed to enroll in Driver's Education is if it were not normally offered in his or her home country. Even after obtaining a license, however, the exchange student is not allowed to drive. There are no exceptions to this rule.

TRAVELLING AND VISITING

Host family, school, church or other organised trips are encouraged if certain conditions are met. Students are allowed to travel only with an adult approved by the host family, or alone for a visit to a relative or family known to the natural parents or to the host family.

In order for a student to travel, he or she must have the prior approval of the host family, the student's natural parents and guardian, the STS area representative and the STS head office. Travelling should not unduly interfere with your student's schooling.

It is wise to check with your area representative and with immigration authorities before your student leaves the country. Students who leave the country on an approved trip must be sure to take along their passports. You should confirm that the student's visa permits multiple entries into your country.

Relatives and friends of your exchange student are not allowed to visit your student during the exchange program. If the natural parents and siblings wish to visit your student, it is recommended that they do so at the end of the program. STS discourages parents' visits during the exchange as these visits tend to interrupt the experience and the student's acclimation to the new life. For instance, with one's natural parents visiting, a student may feel a sense of obligation to both sets of parents. Furthermore, a student can be left with great loneliness and homesickness when the natural parents depart, causing unnecessary readjustment problems.

RELIGION

While STS expects exchange students to participate in a full range of family activities, church attendance is an exception. The student should be given the option of attending services and church activities, but should not be pressured into accompanying the host family. The student may choose to attend a church of his or her choice or not to attend at all.



When a student does participate in the host family's religious events, it can become an important part of the overall exchange experience. Perhaps introducing your student to a youth group at church will give him or her the opportunity for new friendships and different activities.

FINANCES

STS exchange students are expected to provide their own spending money, so that no requests for financial assistance from you should be necessary. Host families are only responsible for food and housing expenses. Money can often cause difficulties between people, so it is preferable to maintain independence from your student's financial affairs.

However, teenagers sometimes need guidance in managing their funds. They should be cautioned against lending or borrowing money to or from anyone. Students should be reminded not to allow their funds to run low since it may take quite some time to receive money from overseas. If you feel your student has insufficient funds for his or her requirements, contact your STS area representative who will assist you in solving this problem.

Shortly after their arrival, we recommend the students to open a chequing or savings account, if possible, to which funds can be transferred from overseas. Students are not permitted to use their host family's account, nor should they have a host family member's name on the account. The home country bank can transfer deposits directly to the student's account or money can be wired to the student for deposit into his or her account.

Should your student wish to supplement his or her income, he or she is only permitted to take small jobs such as baby-sitting or yard work.

TELEPHONE AND COMPUTER USAGE

Shortly after your student arrives in your home, explain fully the use of the computer and telephone and long distance calling. Individual families have their own rules for computer and phone use – length and frequency of computer usage, length of calls, where you can call, and frequency. These should be explained carefully to the newest family member.

Your student is required to pay for each domestic, long distance call. All overseas telephone

"I wake up every morning to a beautiful view of vineyard and little orange and white houses. From the balcony I can see an entire mountain range and sometimes it becomes difficult to comprehend this beautiful world god has given us. Becoming part of a new family is embarrassing, fun, difficult and crazy. Actually here the one English word most Italian students know is 'crazy'. In fact they often go around saying 'he's crazy', 'she's crazy' if you don't understand something.

The food, wow! Soooooooo good! You wouldn't believe how good it is. You can't stop yourself from having 2 or 3 helpings sometimes; pasta, chicken, salad, 20 different types of cheese, coffee – food from your greatest dreams. Italy. In one word – Wow! What an opportunity to go on an exchange."

Angela on exchange in Italy



calls by your student should be made as collect calls. When explaining telephone fees for long distance calling, it is helpful to show the student a copy of a previous telephone bill illustrating that the date, length of call, and the total cost of every long distance call that appears on the bill. This education on the reality of telephone costs can minimise misunderstandings during your student's visit with your family.

If the student's home country will not accept collect calls, explain to your student that he or she can call and get his or her parents on the telephone. Then, the student can request that the parents call him or her back immediately. Be sure that the student understands that he or she is to pay for these short, less than a minute, calls. Long distance phone cards can also be purchased at many local retail outlets. This allows the student to pay in advance for a limited amount of long distance time to their country.

KEYS

We are happy to say that most of our host families who have had students before, have allowed them to have a key. This makes the stay easier for everybody concerned and is a sign of trust. The students need access to the house at all times in case of an emergency, bad weather or they may have simply forgotten something important.

HOST BROTHER AND SISTER RELATIONSHIP

As a host brother or sister, you will have an opportunity for a unique connection with the exchange student who is joining your family. This special relationship, however, will take time to

"I was never homesick during my exchange year in Denmark. When you first meet the Danish people they are very discreet but in fact they have a very good sense of humor and are incredibly warm and welcoming. The joy and peacefulness of this beautiful country is quite striking. The laid back relationship between students and teachers ensures that the youth enjoy attending school."

Rebecca on exchange in Denmark

grow. Do not expect your friendship to materialise immediately. It will take time and shared experiences to develop your relationship. Be aware that it is quite reasonable to have many different feelings, both positive and negative, for your new family member.

While you will be eager to introduce your new exchange brother or sister to all your school, church and neighborhood friends, you must remember that this may be overwhelming to the student. You may find you will have to go slowly, and gradually introduce him or her to different friends.

You may feel that other members of your family are paying too much attention to your new family member, particularly your parents. Try to think of how it would be for you if you went to another country to live, i.e. how difficult it would be in the beginning to meet so many new people and have so many new experiences. Allow yourself the room to feel an array of emotions from affection to jealousy.



At stages in your relationship with anyone, you are bound to feel these things, and your growing friendship with the exchange student is no exception. As you interact at home and perhaps at school, you should make the effort to discuss your feelings openly with the student to reach a deeper understanding of one another.

It may take time, but you will become a very special person in your exchange sister or brother's life. With patience, understanding and a willingness to learn about his or her life, you will both achieve a lasting friendship.

DATING

Dating is something most teenagers like to do. In your country, dating can be very different than in other countries. Discuss the dating practices of his or her country with your student. We at STS prefer to discourage any steady dating or personal involvement with only one person.

Encouraging activities with a group of friends rather than single dating affords your student the opportunity to learn more from a variety of experiences with other teens instead of one particular person.

LAWS

The most important thing that you should know is that if your student breaks any state or federal law he or she will be sent home immediately. The laws may be different from those in the student's home country, which is why it is important to find out what they are at an early stage.

Even "minor" infractions, such as exchanging money on the black market or making purchases for foreign friends in hard-currency shops that are off limits for natives, can lead to severe penalties. Breaking a law will, at a minimum, get the student dismissed from the exchange

"The classmates I had were the best classmates ever. Each one of them helped me with school and they never let me be alone. I just had to get to know them, and then we were all comfortable around each other. This year was definitely better than I had expected it to be. Homesickness was hard to get through at the beginning of the year, but as time went on I felt more at home in Sweden. Still, earlier in the year I had to think positive. Thinking positive and talking to my friends and host family got me through the homesickness. Living with a new family took some time getting used to. I had to adjust to their rules, food, and culture. My host parents did not have strict rules. Their main ru-

les were: to stay safe, be responsible, be respectful, clean up after myself, and have fun. The Swedish desserts are to die for! They are absolutely amazing! In the Swedish culture, people take things one step at a time, and the people are open about many things. When they felt like they could be open around me then they were open, and they loved to talk. I encourage everyone who wants to stand out and learn, to be an exchange student. Sweden has taught me so much about itself and myself. I will always remember Sweden as the year I found myself, I found who I am."

Olivia on exchange in Sweden



program and possibly deported from the host country. It is important that the student understands the cultural context of these laws and regulations.

Alcohol

All STS students have signed the STS rules stating that no drinking is allowed, regardless what laws and regulations there are in the host country as well as in the home country. Students are told about this during orientation and in their home countries, but you will need to remind your student of this rule as well. If you have any problems, questions or concerns regarding the use of alcohol, please contact your area representative.

Drugs

No drugs! No excuses! Any contact with drugs, including marijuana, is illegal. STS will send home any student who is found using, selling or possessing drugs.

"As host family to 12 students over the years there are many stories to tell, enough to fill a book! The student's parents living on the other side of the world become your friends. An unexpected letter 'we are coming to Australia, can we meet somewhere?' is so exciting. The wonder on the students' face when they first see a rosella or a cockatoo or the delight when they touch a koala or a kangaroo, are experiences not to be missed. For us, the empty places in the house and in our hearts after they have returned home is the only sad part of hosting a student."

STS host family in Australia

Smoking

Most high schools have banned smoking completely. In several countries laws prohibit the sale of tobacco products to anyone under the age of 18. You will have to explain these rules, as well as other smoking prohibitions in your community to your student. We discourage all of our students from smoking. Please alert STS if you have difficulties with your student.

Safety

You should have a conversation with your student about safety in your area of the country. Common sense will be very important. Explain to your student that he or she should never leave the home without telling someone where he or she is going. Ask your student to always leave a number where he or she can be reached.

INSURANCE

STS is responsible for making sure that all the students have a complete insurance protection during the entire stay in the host country. STS provides the students with a travel insurance from Europ Assistance / Falck TravelCare. This insurance is adjusted to our high school program and has no excess rate.

The insurance period begins at the time of the departure from the students home country and ends at the time of the return (5–10 days after school ending date). The students will have the insurance documents, claim forms and Travel Assistance Cards, which should be kept in the wallet with him or her. The insurance policy can be found at our website.

The insurance does not cover claims if the insured has misused alcohol or drugs. You are



always welcome to contact us if you have any questions about the insurance. All students need to be insured by this insurance or an insurance which the student can demonstrate is equally good.

The insurance covers illness and injuries which occur during the STS program. Routine physical exams and immunisations are not covered. These exams should have been done in your student's home country.

You can arrange for medical care for your student just as you would for your own child. Remember, that your student carries and independent insurance policy and **YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR STUDENT'S MEDICAL BILLS**. Please do not be persuaded to guarantee payment for your student's medical bills. You can authorise medical care for your student without agreeing to be responsible for the medical bills.

Should your student need to be admitted to a hospital, the insurance company and the STS national office **MUST** be notified. Do not assume the hospital will do this for you. The number is printed in the insurance policy and also on the insurance card. Please, call the national office with information about your student's situation and they may contact the insurance company.

If your student will require medical treatment that exceeds \$ 1000.00, the insurance company must authorise that treatment before it begins. Call your area representative, regional coordinator, or the STS National Office at once if your student is injured or becomes seriously ill.

If you have any questions about insurance; we will be happy to help you. Please note that if a claim or a treatment has already started, the insurance company has professional secrecy and will only give out information directly to the student and/or to the natural parents.

Finally...

On behalf of our staff and volunteers at STS, we would once again like to thank you for opening up your home and way of life to our student. Without your generous support, our student's visit to your country would not be possible.

STS is confident that everyone involved in an international exchange will be able to profit from such a wonderful opportunity. The handbook that we have compiled for you contains many useful tips and you should refer to it throughout the exchange experience. Above all, please remember that the most important ingredient to a successful experience is to keep the line of communication open!



FAQ

What does hosting mean?

Hosting means you open your heart and home to a teenager from another country. You provide the same loving, caring environment for them as you do a member of your own family. The student becomes a member of your family, participating in all aspects of your daily life – family gatherings, holidays, even short vacations.

Who can become a host family?

STS host families come from all walks of life. They include farming families, urban families, couples and individuals. To be eligible, you must be over 25 and able to provide meals and a bed. The most important qualification is the right attitude. STS host parents are caring, open-minded, understanding and interested in learning about other cultures. They're the kind of people you would want your own children to live with if they travelled overseas. We accept many types of families. Single parent families, families with children of any age, childless families and families with grown children.

What is the host family responsible for?

The host family is responsible for food, a separate bed, and a quiet place to study. The STS area representative will obtain the signed school acceptance form prior to the student's arrival to the country.

How do I become a host family?

To initiate the process of becoming a host family, complete an application form and provide references. Then an STS representative will visit your home, talk with all the members of your family, answer your questions and give you information about the program and your obligations. If your family is selected, you will work with the STS area representative to choose a student who fits your family, local school and community.

Who are STS exchange students?

STS students are enthusiastic high school students between the ages of 15 and 18, who have a strong desire to learn about your country and to act as ambassadors for their countries.

STS staff carefully screen all students in their home countries to determine whether they have the maturity, academic achievements, language skills and adaptability to make the most of their experience.

How long do students stay?

Students stay for either a full school year, a school semester or a short stay program for 2 to 3 months.

How are STS students selected for a host family?

At STS, we consider many factors before selecting a student for your family. We look at



a student's interests and personality. Then we match these characteristics to what we know about your family, community and schools. Often we are able to offer you a choice of students. The host family may request a student from a country they have special interest in. We try and match as much as possible to ensure a successful experience. The process takes time, but the effort is worth it. It is the host family that decides which student they want to welcome into their home.

What if it doesn't work out?

STS staff and volunteers are fully prepared to find another host family for a student, but this is rarely required. In a situation where the "chemistry" doesn't seem right, our area representatives can often help resolve misunderstandings or problems. If a move becomes necessary, STS places no blame or fault on the student nor the family.

How much does it cost to host?

Host families provide food and lodging. Students provide their own spending money for long distance phone calls, travel expenses, extracurricular activities and personal items, such as clothing and toiletries. All STS exchange students are fully covered by private health, accident and travel insurance.

Do host families receive compensation for hosting students?

STS host families are volunteers and do not receive any fees for hosting students. Because there are no financial rewards, our experience is that our host families really want to share their lives with a student and that they will treat a student like a member of the family.

What are the rewards in hosting?

Your family gains a new family member. The relationships that evolve throughout your year as a host parent will last a lifetime. The focus of this program is to have host families and students learn from each other, e.g., culture, customs, regional expressions, and daily life.

How do I integrate a student into my family life?

Treat your student as you would your own son or daughter. Time spent with friends outside the home is an important part of a student's learning experience. Establish guidelines for their behaviour, just as you would for your own children. Shortly after they arrive, explain these guidelines, as well as your expectations regarding household responsibilities.

What happens if the student is ill or in an accident?

Our students have their own medical insurance. Each student has got an insurance card that he or she should keep in the wallet. For more details regarding the insurance, please read the insurance policy.

What about spending money?

The student's natural parents agree to send adequate spending money. This money should be enough for clothing, social activities, trips, school expenses, and telephone calls to his or her home country. It might be a good idea if the host family helps the student set up a bank account to help him or her keep the money in a safe place.

Are we supposed to show them our country?

It would be nice, but you are not obliged to.



Trips are organised and available to the students through STS. We send out information about the trips offered well in advance of the planned trip. Students are not allowed to travel alone or with friends anywhere. Keep in mind that this is an academic program with opportunities for travel for students who are meeting academic standards.

What is expected of the exchange student?

Our students are on an academic exchange program. This means, they must attend all of their classes, participate in class, and maintain at least a "C" average in all classes. The student has an orientation that explains the rules they agree to abide by. These include obeying all local, state, and federal laws. They may be immediately dismissed from the program and sent home for violation of these laws. They are expected to follow host family rules concerning family responsibilities such as chores. They must also obey curfews established by the host family.

Will the student travel alone or with a group to the host country?

This varies from departure to departure. Whenever possible, the student will travel with a group, but depending on the school start date and the destination, the student may travel on his or her own.

When is the departure?

The departure date is planned in accordance with the school start date and thus depends on the school the student is placed in.

Does the student need a visa?

STS helps out with necessary documents if a

visa is needed, but it is the student's responsibility to make sure that he or she receives the visa in good time.

Does a student need to have pre-knowledge in the language of the program country?

English is sufficient for all programs, even for the non-English speaking countries. For some countries, pre-knowledge of an additional language is required.

Is the student required to get all vaccinations?

Yes. Immunisations are required by the schools and if the student's immunisation record is not up to date in the destination country, the school may opt to not accept the student. Alternatively, the student may be required to obtain missing vaccinations upon arrival, which may cost more than in the home country.

How does STS select host families?

STS host families are chosen very carefully. All families are visited in their homes and references are checked before they are approved as host families. We demand that they have at least two recommendations from independent parties, e.g. the school, the church or a neighbour. When a family has been accepted, the area representative reads through the application papers of several students and chooses a few which seem to make a good match with a particular family. Information about these selected students are brought to the family in question, and the family then chooses which student they would like to invite into their home.



May the student change host families?

If the chemistry does not seem right, the STS representative will always be there to support both the student and the host family. If a move becomes necessary, STS will find a new host family. Remember that it takes time to feel at home in a new country and a new family. Prepare yourself for this. The area representative will be there to support and assist you if this situation should arise.

Does the student get credit in his or her home country for the time abroad?

Generally, courses taken while on exchange do not count for credit. Your student should consult with a school counselor prior to departure.

What subjects will the student study?

This varies depending on the program country and the school. Typically, the school will require the student to study certain mandatory subjects and then choose a couple optional courses. Examples of subjects that are often mandatory are history, English, a foreign language and mathematics.

Will there be other exchange students at school?

This varies from school to school. STS generally avoids placing two or more students of the same nationality in the same school.

Will the students be able to participate in a sports team, graduate and get a high school diploma?

This is up to the school board of the school in question. STS cannot influence this decision.

Sometimes the students have to do try-outs to be able to join a sports team.

"Dear STS, it has been our pleasure to host exchange students. My husband, Bob, and I have hosted our 8th full year student and are anxiously anticipating the August 8th arrival of our newest family member, Daniel, from the Czech Republic. What an exciting time this is! Each year, our family expands and our knowledge of the people of our world grows stronger. We gain a new son or daughter, and an extended family overseas. Once a connection has been established, if nourished, the bond never goes away. Our hope is that more families will open up their homes and hearts to exchange students.

Many families, when approached about hosting, say that they wouldn't be good because they are too busy. My experience has been the opposite. The busier the family, the better the exchange student fits into our fast paced society! We also hear that families are too small and there wouldn't be enough for the student to do. Most exchange students have a great ability to find friends through their schools, neighborhoods, or extracurricular activities. These young people are very good at finding their own ways to connect with people their own age! The benefits of hosting are numerous. The only way to find out how much there is to be gained by becoming a host family is to do it! Best wishes in all that you do!"

Sincerely,
STS Host Parent, USA



NOTES

Student name

Address

E-mail

Phone

Skype

Natural parents

E-mail

Phone

Skype

Area representative

E-mail

Phone

School name

Office details

Emergency number

Important dates to remember

Arrival date

Return flight date

Insurance dates

Visa expiry date

Birthdays

STS High School is established on all continents,
with over 20 offices and a number of partner
organisations all over the world!



STS

STS High School