



THE FRIENDSHIP JOURNEY HOSTING HANDBOOK

A Practical Guide When the World Comes to Visit



Since 1980 Nativity has worked with schools in 22 different countries to provide a global experience. And now

WELCOME TO THE WORLD

This content of this guide has been created from the collective wisdom of parents, teachers, students and others who have been our companions on the Friendship Journey for the last 20 years. Hopefully, it will help you have one of the most fulfilling experiences of your life, as well as make it a journey worth remembering for your family and guests.

If there is one message to remember: YOU ARE NOT IN THIS ALONE.

You have multiple resources to call upon to help make this experience the best for your family. That's Nativity. That's what we do!

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A young person is traveling thousands of miles, dependent upon people they have never met and do not know. You are wise to start their journey with

COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE

Start by sending an email to the parents of visiting students. The content of the communication includes the following:

- An introduction to the family – names, ages, genders of all residing in the home. This includes any pets the hosting family may have.
- Words of welcome to Cincinnati.
- A brief outline of what the family routine is on a school day and on the weekends. This gives the visiting student an idea of what to expect.
- Questions about allergies, favorite foods.
- The suggestion that he/she bring a recipe for a favorite food/dessert that you can try making together when he/she is here.

Be aware that although every visiting student is different, they are entering a potentially stressful situation. They may be experiencing many “firsts”- the first time on a plane, the first time away from their family, the first time with people who only speak English. Their travel has taken anywhere from 10 hours to 48 hours. On top of that, given the excitement, anticipation, and comfort of sleeping on a plane, it’s fairly safe to assume the student has not had a good nights sleep in 24-72 hours!

So, the more that you can do to reduce that stress the better.

- Let your student know that you realize that he/she is probably feeling excited, nervous, and scared.
- Let him/her know how happy you are that he/she is visiting with your family.

It is customary that the visiting student will bring a gift for he/her American host family.

The gift should be accepted with gratitude and can often serve as a “conversation starter”. You should not, however, be offended if the visiting student does not bring a gift. For some of our exchanges this is a “first” and school may not have suggested that their students bring a gift.



Relating to something familiar helps establish a sense of security and comfort when facing the unknown. For your visitors, give them an anchor with your

HOME, FAMILY, AND ROUTINE

While every home is different, **talking to your visiting student about family rules, routines and literally showing him/her how things work will help to alleviate much of his/her stress and increase his/her comfort level.** Remember these students are 10-14 years old, so like your children when learning something new, they need to hear the information in little bits.

When your visitor arrives show him/her around the house. Who has what bedroom. Where will he/she sleep? How does the shower (faucets) work? Where is there a computer that he/she can use? Where can he/she go if he/she needs some quiet time to him/herself?

As the time arrives let your visiting student know about family routines. *After school Tommy does his homework right away so there is time to play outside. That would be a good time for you to email home.* Another example: *We usually take our showers/baths in the evening. When would you like to take a bath/shower?*

What are the family rules? *If you want something to drink just help yourself or please ask before you get a drink from the refrigerator.*

Once the student has arrived in Cincinnati and is settled in with the host family, a quick e-mail home to let the visiting student's parent know that he/she has arrived safely is appropriate. E-mailing pictures can also go a long way in helping the parents of the visiting student to feel at ease with having their child so far from home.

SPECIAL NOTE: Phone calls between parents and child are seldom a good idea. If the visiting student is experiencing homesickness, the sound of a parent's voice will only make it more difficult for the student to "leave home behind" and enter into the experience.

Contact the visiting chaperone if the homesickness does not pass within 2 days.



While your students are visiting, there are some things you will be expected to do, and a few you will not be expected to do.

HOST FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

You should expect to be at the airport to welcome the visiting students when they arrive.

A “Welcome” sing with your student’s name will bring a smile to their face.

We have found it helpful to **have a potluck dessert gathering at a hosting family's home on the first or second night**, particularly if arrival is on a Friday or Saturday and students will not see each other until Monday. Seeing their chaperones and fellow travelers soon after their arrival eases the transition to Cincinnati.

Though host families enjoy getting to know the chaperons during their stay with us., **chaperones cannot go to every parents home.** It is suggested that two or three sets of parents collaborate on a dinner that is hosted at one home.

A farewell gathering for a potluck dinner at the home of a host family allows for small group time away from the large group setting of the school farewell assembly. Also, due to airport security ,we leave the students at the airport right after check-in. This does not provide a time conducive to words of thanks, lots of hugs (and tears).

Host families are expected to pay for or provide for lunches at school, entry fees for field trips, transportation fees for field trips, and any fees for group or family outings outside of school time.

Nativity cannot control the amount of money each student brings. Students arrive with money they have saved and/or their parents have provided for them to purchase souvenirs or gifts to take home. For some students a visit to America is a rare opportunity to purchase a variety of consumer goods that are not readily available or that are very expensive in their country.

You can understand the sense of urgency on the part of the visiting student, which often feels like too much focus on shopping. It is helpful if the hosting parent outlines the activities for the week and lets their guest know when there will be an opportunity to go shopping. By asking the visiting student just what it is he/she is looking for, the host parent can guide the student to the appropriate store.

It is also customary for the host family to give a gift to the visiting student to remember his/her stay in Cincinnati.

Examples: A photo memory album of the visit; postcards of places visited; in Cincinnati that you may have visited; local food such as Skyline Chili mix; local team t-shirts or hats; Nativity sweatshirt



The journey offers our visitors many insights, including the life we live here in the United States.

A NORMAL (OR CLOSE TO IT) LIFE

Part of getting to know someone is to understand how he or she lives. **Where there is a temptation to take your guest “everywhere” and show him/her “everything”, that is not practical.** It gives a false impression of how American families live.

Several field trips to local points of interest will be arranged by Nativity School. At the parent meeting to organize the visit, options will be discussed. It is important that each hosting family honor the general range of activities agreed upon at the organization meeting. Open for discussion in the preplanning are gatherings such as a picnic in the park, going to a movie, or going ice skating. Low cost events where all of the students can go and every host family does not need to be present will be considered at our meeting.

For some families a visit to grandmother’s house for Sunday dinner is what they do. Provide the visiting student with information about what is likely to occur. *Uncle John will ask you about sports in your country.* The “heads up” gives the visiting student time to think about the response. *If you don’t like grandmother’s pie, you don’t have to finish it.*

Share this type of information before you go to any place that may seem routine for you.

Letting the student know what/who they will see, how long they will be there, what you will be doing, and what you think they should be doing makes the experience less anxiety ridden and more enjoyable overall. Events such as going to church, sports practice, scout meetings, the grocery store, visiting relatives/friends, a school play, or a festival are examples of common events for us but new experiences for a visiting student.

SPECIAL NOTE: Much to the dismay of many, SCHOOL IS STILL A PRIORITY! Students from Nativity who are hosting a student from abroad still have academic obligations they are expected to fill. A quiet evening at home so the American student can do homework is appropriate. That gives the visiting student time to e-mail home, write in a journal, play board games with younger host family members, etc



While your student will have an incredible experience, there may be a few small challenges as they adjust to their surroundings.

POTENTIAL BUMPS ON THE JOURNEY

It is not uncommon for visiting students to feel a bit homesick the first several days. For some if not most it is their first trip abroad. They are staying with families they do not know, living in a city where they do not have complete command of the language, eating foods that may seem strange or different.

Once the visiting student experiences the American hospitality and realizes that he/she won't starve, they begin to settle in. Within a couple of days the student generally feeling comfortable, and by the end of the visit he/she wants to stay longer.

The first couple of days are the challenging ones. The temptation will be to have the student call home to be reassured by his/her parents. That tactic does not work and only increases the chances that the student will not adjust as quickly.

Our experience also has been that **visiting students often like to be with their friends from home** for several reasons.

- It's hard to speak and think in a foreign language – harder if your fluency is not that well developed. The opportunity to speak in your first language is a welcome respite from speaking English.
- Until the student feels more at home, it's helpful to be with people who know you and are experiencing the same adjustment to a new culture and cuisine.

It has been helpful for host families to “help each other out” by arranging time for the visiting students to be together. That can be a pick up football / basketball game, cookie bake date, or taking several visiting students together to the mall.

While you do not need to provide a private room for your visiting student, **it is helpful for him/her to know where he/she can go if he/she would like some alone or “downtime”**. Sometimes having just 30 minutes where he/she does not need to talk or listen to English re-energizes the student

The visiting students chaperones are excellent first resources. If the visiting student seems to be extraordinarily homesick, the host parent should call the chaperones that can then intervene. Only as a last result do you call his/her parents at home.



These are the most common issues (but rarely encountered) host parents have been concerned about over the last 20+ years.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What do you do if a discipline problem arises?

Our experience has been that the best route to take is to bring the visiting chaperone into the discussion right away. There may have been a misunderstanding due to culture or language. Explain what happened and ask the chaperone to help problem solve. You can assume that all are of good will and want the experience to be a positive one. That said, should there be an irreconcilable difference, the visiting student can be removed from your home, but that should be the last resort.

What do you do if the visiting student doesn't talk, stays by him/herself?

- If he/she doesn't talk or stays aloof, it may be shyness or just knowing what to say or how to say it. Give it some time before calling the visiting teacher.
- You can try charades, your version of "Pictionary".
- Often making use of a bi-lingual dictionary (German-English; English-German) is a way to start a conversation – one word at a time. If language is the issue, the dictionary equalizes the playing field because both "sides" need to use it.
- Bring out an atlas and ask questions about the student's country.
- Humor can bridge most gaps and make people feel at ease.

What if the visiting student is overbearing?

If it were an American who were overbearing, you could just walk away. That's tough to do when the person is living in your home. One approach is to slow things down by asking questions or playing cards or a board game where everyone has to take a turn.

What if there is a medical emergency or sickness?

Contact the visiting chaperone immediately if the visiting student becomes sick or injured. The second call should go to the Nativity administrative staff (Mr. Herring or Mrs. Ciarniello). They will consult with the visiting chaperone and make a decision about appropriate treatment.



IDEAS AND RESOURCES

Visiting Chaperones. See visiting delegation roster for names and phone numbers

Nativity Staff

Bob Herring W: 513-458-6767 H: 513-731-4743
Nancy Ciarniello, W: 513-458-6767
The Nativity teachers who are part of the exchange

Other Host Families: See visiting delegation roster for names and phone numbers.

Nativity families who are familiar with the dynamics of hosting. Contact the office for names and phone numbers.

These are great places to take your visiting student to find some “comfort food” to ease the transition to American cuisine.

Jungle Jim’s
Route 4 in Fairfield
Foods from around the world.

Asia Market
Reading Road at Glendale Milford Road (Evendale)
Food from Asian countries

Flaggs USA
3075 Madison Road in Oakley 533-0330
They have flags of all sizes for all countries as well as small items (e.g. stuffed bears, key chains, ties) that say USA on them. Mention you are from Nativity.