



Student Homestay Guidelines

Staying with a host family in America is a very special opportunity. To get the most from this experience, you have to be a full participant. The more curious and enthusiastic you are, the more you will learn about your host family and life in the US. Your hosts were chosen because of their interest in you and your culture. They want to learn about you and your family. An important key to a good homestay experience is to be open to new ideas and experiences, and to establish good communication with your host family. Here are some guidelines that you will need to understand and follow:

1. Hosts' rules: Although you are paying for your room and board, the household in which you are staying is neither a hotel nor a dormitory. Your host will treat you as a new family member, a guest, and a renter. Each homestay is unique; therefore, you will need to discuss the rules of the house when you move in.

Some questions you might start with are:

- A. What time is dinner? How may I help with dinner preparations and clean up?
- B. Which meals will I need to prepare for myself?
- C. What time do most family members go to bed? When must I be in bed and quiet?
- D. Can anyone help me with my homework? When can I get help?
- E. How loud may I play my electronics?
- F. May I bring friends home with me after school or on the weekends?
- G. What is the time limit for showers?

You will think of many more questions; we encourage you to discuss them with your host.

2. Settling in: Your host can help you with many details like setting up a bank account, or getting a phone. Your host may give you a house key and teach you how to take the bus to and from school.

3. Communication: Speak as much as possible and ask questions. Do not be embarrassed about your level of English speaking ability. You are here to learn! Communicate your needs; ask for advice; talk! You can't improve your speaking and listening skills if you stay in your room. Be sure to talk with all the members of your household.

4. Host activities: You will be invited to participate in family activities and outings. This is one of the main reasons why you are a part of the homestay program, so you will be expected to join them. If you would rather be excused from an activity, discuss it with your host family at least one or two days in advance and thank them for including you. It will be the host parents' decision to allow you to be excused. It's polite to ask them in advance if it will cost extra. You can ask, "How much shall I pay?" or, "How much spending money will I need to bring?"

5. Your payment: Your family is responsible to pay your host a monthly stipend. The rate is agreed upon in advance and is not negotiable. Your host family will receive their payments by your agency or by San Francisco Christian School. The following are examples of things included or not included in your homestay fee. These may differ slightly with each host family.

Included:

- Laundry detergent, toilet paper
- Breakfast and dinner, 7 days a week, and lunch on the weekends
- Electricity, water and heat (please conserve!)
- Mileage (if the host drives you somewhere)
- Dinner with your hosts in a restaurant (if they invite you)

Not Included:

- Toiletries (shampoo, toothpaste, etc)
- Snack foods (chips, candy, soft drinks, etc)
- Personal phone
- Computer, printer
- Bus fare, taxi
- Special activities with your host (concert or sports tickets, entrance fees, spending money for refreshments or souvenirs)

6. Helping in the home: In most households, all members are expected to help with the housework. In most homestays, the mother does not stay home full time, so the children learn to make their breakfast, and husbands cook, clean and do laundry.

- A. Always make your own bed and keep your room clean by weekly removing garbage, vacuuming and washing your sheets. Ask where to put your garbage and recycling.
- B. Offer to help set and clear the table for shared meals. Offer to wash and dry dishes or load and unload the dishwasher.
- C. Make sure that you know how the kitchen works: what goes down the sink drain and /or garbage disposal, what gets thrown out and what gets recycled. Learn where the utensils, cups and dishes are kept, and always clean up after yourself.
- D. Ask how to operate the washer and dryer and what times and days you can use the machines.
- E. Keep the bathroom that you use clean and tidy; learn how the shower and bath work; and what not to put down the toilet, as well as how to keep the shower curtain inside the shower (American homes do not have drains in the bathroom floor!). Wipe the sink and counter area after you are finished.
- F. Volunteer for another chore that you can do as your share of the housework.

7. **Manners:** Please remember to say "Please" when asking for something and "Thank you" when your host helps you and after you have enjoyed a delicious meal. Learning to display good manners will help you in any social situation.

8. **Schedule:** Your host family needs to know about and approve any change in your schedule. If you need to come home later than planned, or if your plans change, or if you will not be home as expected, please call home for permission to change your plans, or leave a message so that they don't worry about you. You are being a responsible young person when you clear your plans with your host. Your safety and well-being is of great concern to your family.

9. **Roles** of host father, mother and children: The roles of women and men in the US may be different from that in your own country. Don't be surprised if your host father cooks dinner or washes the dishes. Children may seem very outspoken. Age is not as important in the US in the way we speak to each other. Of course we want you to feel comfortable in your homestay, but it will take time for you to get used to your family life. We hope you speak to all your hosts with the same respect; however if the children are bothering you, it is very acceptable to tell them (politely) that you don't want to be disturbed. If it continues, please talk to one of the parents.

10. **Strong odors:** Please be aware of the fact that strong odors (body odor, cologne or perfume, garlic, etc.) can be very irritating to Americans. Like in many countries around the world, Americans bathe every day, use deodorant after bathing, and wear clean clothes each day. They also brush their teeth at least twice a day after eating. These should also be a part of your grooming routine. Some people are even allergic to cologne, perfume or flowers, so be willing to make adjustments in order to respect the preferences and needs of others.

11. **Damage:** SFCS will not be responsible for any damage or broken items in the hosts' home. Please respect the property of the host family. They understand that there will be some normal wear and tear by virtue of having you in the home. However, if you damage or break something, please offer to replace the item or pay for repairing the damage. The SFCS administration is available to mediate between student and family if necessary.

12. **Driving:** If you plan on driving, be sure that you have a valid driver's license. You must also have automobile insurance. Ask your hosts for help finding the DMV and calling an insurance company. Do not ask to drive the host's car.

13. **Drinking and Smoking:** You may come from a culture where drinking alcoholic beverages or smoking tobacco is acceptable, even for children. Students at SFCS are not permitted to drink alcoholic beverages or smoke at any time while enrolled. Please do not bring alcohol or tobacco into your hosts' home. If you are offered alcohol or tobacco in some social setting, please politely say, "No, thank you."

14. **Drugs:** Recreational drug use is also prohibited. Any form of recreational drugs is illegal. If you are arrested by the police for using drugs, you will go to jail. This will also affect your ability to remain at SFCS as a student.

15. **Medical:** Please bring a copy of your medical insurance and your immunization record to the school office, and show your host your medical card that shows you have medical coverage. You should carry your medical insurance information with you at all times. If you get sick, your host will help you go to the doctor if necessary. If you have a serious accident or illness, an SFCS staff member will also help by calling your parents and other authorities as appropriate. If you take medications, please share that information with your host. They need to know in case you have an emergency. The labels on the medications should also be in English.

16. **Trial period:** Your first month or two in your homestay is a time for your host and you to try living together. If it is not a good match (too noisy, too quiet, too dirty, too clean, or your personalities just don't get along), please speak with the SFCS administration. We can arrange for you to visit and/or move to a different, more suitable homestay. Since you have signed an agreement promising to try homestay for one academic term, you should make every effort to fulfill that obligation.

17. **Moving:** If it is necessary to change host families, SFCS will arrange for a new host family for you. You must not find a different host family and move on your own. The office must have a current address and phone number on file for you at all times. Please remember to be responsible for the following details:

- Return house keys to the host family.
- Give your host family a forwarding address and phone number, in case mail or important calls come after you move.
- Go to the post office and fill out a change of address form; inform your bank of your new address
- Clean your room thoroughly. Remove all garbage and personal items.

18. **Contact SFCS:** After you discuss these points with your host family, if there is something that you still do not understand or if you have some questions, we encourage you to discuss this with your host family. They really do want to help you, but they will assume you understand if you don't speak up. If you are having problems with your host family or there is something you do not feel comfortable discussing with your host family, please speak with the SFCS administration. We will make arrangements to meet with you and help to resolve the problem carefully. We promise that your call will be confidential (we will NOT discuss your problem with the host without your permission). Our goal is always to make your total experience at SFCS rewarding and beneficial.