



Thank You for Volunteering as a Lions Youth Exchange Host Family.

Your welcoming someone from another country to your community is a great gift. By staying in your home, sharing meals with your family, speaking your language, and participating in your daily activities, that someone will learn far more about your way of life than ever would be possible by reading a book or traveling as a tourist. In return, you will learn something about your visitor's culture, and perhaps your own as well.

Since 1961 Lions Clubs International's Youth Exchange Program has given tens of thousands of young people representing some 80 nationalities an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of their roles as world citizens. We are confident your hosting experience, like that of thousands of other Lions host families around the world, will be enjoyable, rewarding, and memorable.

PREPARATIONS

Correspondence

Before your visitor arrives, every effort will be made to provide you with the youth's name and address in ample time for letters to be exchanged. When writing, you can tell about your home life, the occupations and interests of family members, and your reason for hosting. Describe your community's activities and attractions. Mention practical matters such as the type of clothing needed for weather conditions in your area. You can correspond in the same language you will use for communication during the exchange.

Your prospective visitor will be encouraged to write to you with details about his home and community. Take some time to study the youth's culture and language (if it is different from your own). You and members of your family should be generally familiar with the youth's country: its population, history, major cities. Your knowledge of these things will not only make your visitor feel more at home, it will encourage acceptance of your way of life.

ARRIVAL

Imagine you are a young exchange visitor entering a country for the first time. As you step off the plane, a voice over the loudspeaker announces something in a language you may not understand. You see people dressed in clothing different from your own. Posters advertise products you have never heard of. Soon you will be meeting people you know only by name. Excited but somewhat apprehensive, you wonder what it will be like living with these people under the same roof.

With this picture in mind, you will see why it is important for you to provide your visitor with not only food and shelter, but also sympathy and encouragement. The youth will need your support to gain an accurate comprehension of your culture. With your guidance, the youth's visit can become a valuable learning experience.

Jet Lag

On the day of your visitor's arrival, avoid scheduling too many activities. If the youth has had a long trip or has crossed several time zones, a day or two of rest will be in order. For most people it takes about one day for each hour of jet lag to regain a regular eating and sleeping cycle, so plan accordingly.

Settling In

One of the first things your visitor should do is telephone home collect or send a postcard to confirm safe arrival.

After the youth has notified his family and unpacked, you can give a tour of your house, show where to find things, and explain how to operate appliances. You can also give your visitor a set of house keys with your family's daily schedule and instructions on curfews.

A map of your community, showing the location of the post office, pharmacy, bank, and church, can help your visitor become familiar with your community. The youth will also need a safe place to store passport, travel tickets, insurance documents, and money. For the last of these items, you can assist in opening a bank or checking account.

THE VISIT

Since experiencing family life is one of the best ways to learn about a culture, you should try as much as possible to let your visitor take on a family member's role. This role may be quite different from what the youth is accustomed to, but it should be one that is natural for you and your family. You will find that treating your visitor as a family member will create genuine ties of friendship and foster better understanding of your way of life.

Living as a family member, of course, does not mean having special privileges. It may be easier for your visitor to learn your way of life if you avoid giving preferential treatment. You may even give the youth some small household chores, just as you would to a son or daughter. But don't assign tasks you would normally hire someone to do, such as child-care.

It is important not to leave your visitor alone for long periods of time. One of the parents, or an older son or daughter, should be home during the day to keep the youth company.

Homesickness

After the initial excitement of being in a new environment wears off, your visitor may become homesick. The youth may become withdrawn, uncommunicative, or moody, and express the desire to return home. Should this occur, remember that such behavior can be a normal reaction to culture shock and need not be interpreted as rejection of your family or its hospitality.

Activity is a good cure for homesickness. But if the youth continues to be withdrawn and show symptoms such as excessive sleeping, marked weight loss or gain, acute depression, or other irregular behavior, there may be other, more fundamental problems involved, and you should notify the Lions Youth Exchange Chairman about it.

Meals

One of the most difficult adjustments for your exchange youth may be dietary. Foods favored by young people in your culture may not be the same ones enjoyed by young people in another. Nevertheless, you do not need to arrange special meals for your visitor, unless the youth has special dietary restrictions due to medical or religious reasons. Very likely the youth, perhaps after some initial hesitation, will learn to enjoy the types of food to which you are accustomed.

Cultural differences may involve not only kinds of food, but also the manner in which food is eaten. Since your family's table manners may not correspond to your visitor's, you should go first at mealtimes to show the visitor the proper portions to take and how to eat them.

Meeting People

You should make an effort to introduce your visitor to other young people of the same age group. You might consider planning a reception with friends and neighbors for this purpose. If there are several exchange visitors being hosted in your area, the Lions may organize a barbecue or a tour. Although friendships are encouraged for exchange youths, romantic attachments are discouraged.

Religion

If your visitor practices a faith other than your own, you will want to provide a list of places of worship. Very often, the youth may wish to learn about your family's religion. If so, it would be perfectly appropriate to invite the youth to attend religious services with you.

Alcohol

All host families are discouraged from serving alcohol to exchange visitors, even in cultures where minors are permitted to consume alcohol with meals or socially.

Drugs

Lions exchange youths are informed about the strict prohibition of illegal drug use. If you become aware of a drug problem, you should notify the Lions Youth Exchange Chairman immediately.

Travel

Exchange youths may travel with their host parents or in connection with Lions sponsored functions. If you have planned a side trip to show the youth more of your country, or to take a vacation, you should provide the Lions Youth Exchange Chairman with your destination: duration of the trip; address where you can be reached; and the make, model, color, and license plate of your car.

If your family is planning such a trip, you may want to decide with your visitor how expenses will be apportioned. Discussing such matters may sometimes be awkward, but it can avoid even more awkward misunderstandings later on.

Lions exchange youth are as a rule not permitted to travel on their own, even to visit relatives or close friends. Unless advance arrangements have been made between the youth's parents and the Lions Youth Exchange Chairman, exchange youths are expected to return directly home upon the completion of the exchange visit. If such special travel arrangements have been made, you will be informed in advance.

Changing Host Families

Exchange youths are frequently assigned to more than one host family for their visits. If your young person will be changing families, make sure you know when the change will take place. Be considerate, too, of the family who will next be hosting the youth.

If you will be receiving a youth from another family, bear in mind the change can represent an adjustment for the youth.

The Host Lions Club

During the exchange visit, the host Lions Club will be available to provide support services. Should questions arise, you should feel free to contact them. The Lions Club may invite the youth to a Club meeting to talk about his native land or his impressions of his host country. You may also be invited to participate in a function or event sponsored by the Club for the exchange visitor.

Emergencies

In the unlikely event that your visitor requires medical attention, you and the host Lions will be authorized to make necessary arrangements. All Lions exchange youths are required to have adequate medical, life, personal property, and liability insurance to cover any and all contingencies during the entire duration of the exchange visit. Any costs not covered by the youth's insurance are ultimately the responsibility of the youth's parents.

Departure

Your local Lions will tell you your visitor's scheduled departure date and time. If you can, you may want to accompany the visitor to the airport or terminal to see the youth off.

Before departure, you should check that the youth has his travel documents (passport, visa, return ticket, etc.) in order. In most cases, the youth will need to confirm his return flight, if traveling by air, at least 72 hours before departure or risk losing his reservation.

After the visitor returns home, you are encouraged to maintain contacts through correspondence. You are also encouraged to give the host Lions Club your evaluation of the exchange: its successes, its problems, and your suggestions for other host families. And if your experience has been positive, we hope you will tell other interested families about the program.

The Lions thank you for your important role in promoting friendly relations among the peoples of the world.