



International Program 2023-2024 Host Family Handbook

Oak Grove Lutheran School • Fargo, North Dakota

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Visit oakgrovelutheran.com/international for more information including forms, applications, and policies.

Host Family Information

- Prospective host parents must complete an Oak Grove Host Family Profile. An initial visit to your home is required before you are approved as a host family.
- State law requires both parents/guardians of the host family as well as any adult (18 years of age or older) residing in the home to undergo a background check before a student will be assigned to them. Oak Grove will pay for the administration of the background check and all information in regards to the background check will be kept confidential to Oak Grove Administration and the parents/guardians.
- Host families must complete the Host Family Orientation presented by the Oak Grove International Coordinator before the student's arrival. Please check with the International Coordinator as to when this orientation will be held.
- Host families are expected to house the student for a full academic year (AUGUST-MAY). Host families will be evaluated at semester time if needed but a follow up visit at the end of the year is typical.
- After review and approval by school administration, an international student is assigned a host family by Oak Grove's International Coordinator.
- Oak Grove will transmit the host family profile to the international student's family and the host family will also receive a profile of the student. This provides both the student and the host family with information to create a smooth transition when school begins. Before arrival, a Skype/Zoom call between students and host families is encouraged. This will be set up by the International Coordinator.
- Host parents receive a room/board payment per month over a 10-month period (AUGUST-MAY) paid at the end of each month. This amount may be prorated, according to the actual days the student resides with the family. There are some exceptions to the host fee.
- The international student is expected to participate in family activities as is comfortable and appropriate. If traveling out of town or other responsibilities arise, an approved temporary host home, with background checks and a home check, can be used for the international student. This will be arranged through the International Coordinator. A minimum of a 7-day notice is needed to find temporary housing for students. International students are not allowed to stay with a sibling overnight or on holidays unless coordinated and approved by Oak Grove.

Host Family Responsibilities

The role as a host family is to provide a caring and supportive environment for an international student. The student will learn about American culture from experiences with friends, school, community, but more importantly, the student will learn the most from living with a host family.

The host family is responsible for the following:

- An appropriate living area: A legal bedroom must be provided for each international student. Sharing of a bedroom is not permitted unless under special circumstances, which must be approved by the International Coordinator prior to placement of the student in the home.
- Meals: Host families should provide appropriate and healthy meal options each day and plan that the student eat meals with the family.
- Transportation: Students should be considerate of their host family's schedules when making individual plans. Host families are required to provide or coordinate transportation to and from school and school activities. Oak Grove provides a shuttle service between school campuses for an additional fee that would be paid by the host family.
- Setting rules: Host families are to set rules and communicate them with the international student. It is encouraged to be clear and consistent by writing rules down. Posting the rules and expectations in a common area is strongly encouraged.

Areas/Rules to consider:

- Computer, phone and TV use
- Household chores
- Bedtime hours
- Coming & going (communicating where they will be)
- Homework requirements
- No drinking, smoking, vaping or drug use
- Personal privacy
- Appropriate clothing (may need to discuss dressing for the weather, ie. winter clothes)
- Where the student may eat (dining areas, bedroom, living areas, kitchen etc.)
- Where can the student use the electronics in the home (bedroom, family room, kitchen etc.)
- What electronics can be used in their bedroom (specifically gaming systems, TV's, computers)
- Grades, academic behavior and consequences
- Snacks
- Shower and bathroom guidelines
- Laundry
- Meal preparation
- Transportation
- Having friends/company over
- Family meetings

*** Remember that the international student doesn't intuitively know the host family's rules or expectations. Communicating house rules and expectations will prevent confusion and unnecessary stress.*

Host Family Considerations

Encourage an international student to attend church. If the student objects to attending church, do not require attendance but continue to encourage them and invite them.

When communicating with an international student, speak clearly and distinctly. Remember that one needs to speak slower, not louder. International students will be at different levels of proficiency with the English language. Be patient and continue to try and help the student's English ability; engage the student in conversation on a daily basis.

About International Students

International students will come from varied backgrounds. Host families are encouraged to try to learn about their international student's family and life-style. There may be times when the student might seem confused by things that happen in a host home. Try not to be critical, but rather remember that cultures are uniquely different. There also may be times when the student unknowingly will do something that is offensive and/or rude. Always encourage open and honest communication.

Patience, love, and support are key aspects to hosting an international student. It is important that the international student becomes a member of the family and not treated as a guest. Bonding with the student may not occur immediately, it takes time for both the host family and the student to adjust. Eventually the student will become part of the family. Here are some suggestions:

- By becoming involved in the student's life, a relationship of mutual respect and cooperation will develop.
- Explain language differences, American slang words and phrases; this will help prevent the student from being misunderstood or embarrassed while trying to communicate.
- When making decisions about letting the student participate in something, it is suggested to ask oneself, "Would I let my own child do this?" If a host family is not sure about the decision, talk to the student, and allow him/her to be involved in the decision making process.
- Become interested in the student's country and customs; this lets the student know that he/she is important.
- Be flexible but firm. The more accepting a host family is of an international student, the more enjoyable the exchange of lifestyles and cultures will be. Let the student know what is expected in the way of behavior. Be open and honest about this from the start; young people want to know what is expected of them.
- Treat the student as family, not like "company." It is important that they participate and be incorporated into family and school activities/routines, this includes meals, attending church and similar activities.

Communication

Responsibilities and privileges should be the same for the international student as they are for host family children. Please keep in mind that international students are teenagers, and teenagers are the same throughout the world. They will test the boundaries of the host family (as well as their own family), evaluate their personal relationships and encounter new/exciting experiences. Like adolescents everywhere, international students will be very independent and mature at times yet need support and guidance.

Weekly family meetings have proven to open lines of communication and increase understanding of expectations. It is encouraged to meet as an entire family on a designated day, once per week. Have an agenda for the meeting and allow for everyone to speak openly without fear of being judged. This will create a “safe” atmosphere. Have everyone use a planner or calendar so weekly plans can be communicated openly and early and have everyone record events in their own planners. This has helped significantly to reduce transportation problems as well as unrealistic expectations.

International students’ English skills range from fair to excellent, but it may take them a while to “tune in” to the regional English. Often the student will say “yes” to almost everything; don’t accept this as proof of understanding. If something important is said to the student at the first meeting, repeat it again at least once in the next day or two. Continue to reiterate important things on a weekly basis for the first month or more until it is evident the expectation has been communicated. When checking for understanding, don’t ask, “Do you understand?” as the response will more than likely be a “yes” even if little/no understanding took place. Instead, try having the student repeat what was said using his/her own words. This will allow the level of understanding to be measured. Additionally, as with most teenagers, international students will need to be reminded of family household rules from time to time.

Student Adjustment

Adjusting to a new culture will take time. Both the student and host family will find themselves making adjustments. Be ready to teach and to learn. Remember, an international student is not yet an adult. The first few weeks can be very stressful for them. Try to be patient and understanding and try to keep a sense of humor. Culture shock is “a condition of anxiety and disorientation that can affect someone suddenly exposed to a new culture.” For the student, anxiety and disorientation may show itself in many ways. It often develops after the initial excitement of being in the United States wears off. Symptoms vary from student to student. The international 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 similar to common teenage behavior.

Symptoms of culture shock include:

- Excessive sleeping
- Frequent, ongoing criticism of the U.S., 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/her own room
- Excessive homesickness
- Uncommunicative behavior

International students may not be able to express what they are feeling; they may feel their only recourse is to either “lash out” or “clam up.” The student may think that moving to a new host family could solve the problems that they are experiencing. Be patient and ask the Oak Grove International Coordinator for help. It is hard not to take this behavior personally but be assured that their behavior does not reflect on the host family.

Even though the student has heard a lot about what it means to be an international student, they may not be prepared for the reality. The student may make comparisons between the U.S. and their home country. Criticism is a common defense mechanism used by students to make themselves feel secure in their living arrangements. They may also revert to cynicism or sarcasm.

Keeping an open line of communication is crucial in conquering culture shock. Help the student understand his/her emotions. Encourage physical exercise and participation in different activities to distract the student from thinking too much about his/her home country.

Homesickness

Homesickness is often associated with culture shock. Host families are encouraged not to feel guilty about an international student's unhappiness. If the student continues to be unhappy and depressed long enough for concern, please contact Oak Grove's International Coordinator.

Holidays can also be depressing for an international student. Encourage the student to share their traditions and customs with the family. Also, keep the student actively involved in the family's holiday celebration. Homesickness and culture shock can be combated with patience and understanding.

Sources of information and help with an international student:

Kristi Kegel, International Coordinator – kristi.kegal@oakgrovelutheran.com
Dr. Jean Sando, High School Principal – jean.sando@oakgrovelutheran.com
Courtney Martinson, School Counselor – courtney.martinson@oakgrovelutheran.com
Kim Forness, Director of Admissions – kim.forness@oakgrovelutheran.com