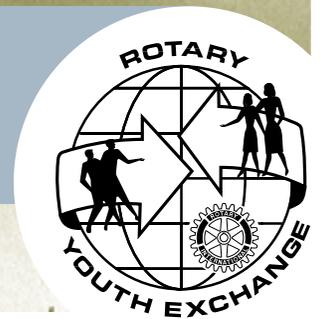
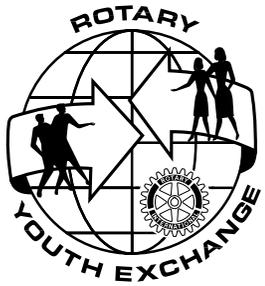


A PRIMER FOR EXCHANGE STUDENTS





## A PRIMER FOR EXCHANGE STUDENTS

Spending time abroad as an exchange student is one of the most unique opportunities available to you. You will be in for an experience that will affect the rest of your life. Your exchange will encompass different phases that will give you opportunities to grow in new ways and experience a new culture and ideas.

The purpose of the Rotary Youth Exchange program is to provide secondary school students with the opportunity to travel abroad, live with a host family, and experience life firsthand in a different country, school, and social environment. Exchange students will gain lifelong advantages through an expanded world view and greater appreciation of the world.



# 1



## INTRODUCTION

This guide serves as a general introduction to the Rotary Youth Exchange program and some of your responsibilities as a participant. This guide also gives you some general points to consider before, during, and after your exchange. Detailed information and any further questions should be covered at orientation sessions, arranged by your local Youth Exchange programs, both before your exchange and upon arrival in your host country. These sessions are of the utmost importance.

A vital part of your exchange is understanding the organization sponsoring you. So, what is Rotary?

**Rotary clubs** are service organizations for local business and professional leaders, which strive to improve the quality of life in their communities, promote high ethical standards in business, and foster international understanding and goodwill throughout the world. Clubs carry out a variety of service activities, one of which is Youth Exchange.

For administrative purposes, clubs are grouped into geographical areas called **Rotary districts**. A Rotary Youth Exchange program is administered entirely at the club and district levels.

**Rotary International (RI)** is the association of Rotary clubs throughout the world. While RI encourages clubs and districts to undertake Youth Exchange activities and offers support through publications and suggested guidelines, Rotary clubs and districts run their Youth Exchange programs independently of RI.

## Rules

The rules of the Rotary Youth Exchange program are essential, as they serve to protect everyone involved. Overall, you are serving as an ambassador for your home country and, therefore, are expected to act responsibly. You are required to adhere to specific rules that are commonsense stipulations and are explained fully in orientation sessions. These rules include:

- No driving of motor vehicles
- No illegal use of drugs or alcohol
- Obtaining special permission for travel outside of the local area while on the exchange
- No romantic involvement or sexual activity during the exchange



The local Rotary club or district also sets other rules that you are required to follow. These vary among Rotary clubs according to local culture, customs, and laws. While some rules may seem strict, the local Youth Exchange program adopted them as the result of experience, and disregarding them can lead to your being sent home.

The rules reflect the Rotary club's and district's commitment to protecting the students during the exchange. You should discuss the rules with the Rotarians organizing your exchange. It is crucial that you understand these rules and why they are in place before leaving your home country.

In addition to the rules mentioned above and your local program rules, attending school is obligatory for long-term exchanges. Most students will be issued a student visa for their host country, and not attending school could result in your early return.

It is important that you understand these rules, your obligations, the expectations of your host families and the Rotarians working with the program, and the arrangements planned by both the sponsor and host Rotary clubs and districts. The orien-

tation sessions and selection process allow you many opportunities to ask questions or request further information.

The more knowledge you have about the details of your exchange, including the responsibilities of the sponsor and host Rotary clubs and districts, the more you will be able to handle all possible situations. Some anxiety is natural and expected when considering going on an exchange, but you must be sure you are comfortable with the program before going to a different country to live with another family. If you have serious reservations about any aspect of the exchange, feel that you cannot meet your obligations, or do not have adequate answers to your questions, you should not participate in the program. Youth Exchange is a great opportunity, but you must be comfortable and prepared to undertake the challenge, fully aware of your rights and responsibilities.

## PREDEPARTURE PREPARATION

### Research Your Destination

The predeparture phase is a good time to study your host country; learning more about where you are going will help



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you build confidence. Libraries, bookstores, the Internet, and consulates are good sources of reference materials that can supplement the outbound orientation program your sending club or district may arrange for you. You should also know something of the history, literature and arts, and principal struggles of your host country. You are by no means expected to become an expert, but you will benefit from acquiring a foundation on which to build your firsthand experience of the host country. You may also wish to speak to former Youth Exchange students who spent their year abroad in that country.

Some Rotary clubs and districts require students to take language courses before departure if an unfamiliar language is spoken in the host country. Knowledge of the host country's language is key to the success of your exchange year. In addition to making your transition easier, it is sometimes needed to obtain visas. Become as proficient as you can before leaving for your exchange. You may wish to contact host country nationals in your area who can help you practice new language skills and provide a deeper understanding of your destination's culture.

## Your Own Culture

Learn about your country's history and heritage. Understanding your own country's values and customs will enable you to better understand those of your host country. As a student ambassador for your country, you will also inevitably be asked questions about your country's customs, culture, history, geography, and government. Being able to answer these questions thoroughly and objectively will allow you to feel more comfortable speaking about your own country and sharing your culture with people in your host country.

## Paperwork

Coordinating your exchange will require you to obtain and complete several necessary travel documents, including a passport, visas, and vaccinations or inoculation certificates. In addition, the governments of the sponsor or host countries may require other documentation. While your sponsor Rotary Youth Exchange officers can help arrange the details, it is primarily your responsibility to ensure that everything is in order.



Here are some of the general arrangements you must make:

- You should apply for a passport as soon as the local Rotary club informs you that you will be recommended to the district program. After you have been fully accepted into the Rotary Youth Exchange program, a guarantee form will be completed and the visa process will begin. Working with your host district, you should start as early as possible in arranging for both of these documents to ensure sufficient time for processing or the need for further supporting documentation.
- You are also responsible for arranging for your airline tickets. In many countries, the Rotary district may organize your travel arrangements or recommend a specific travel agent for substantial savings to you. Please check with your local program to determine how and when you should make your travel arrangements and what type of airline ticket you should purchase.
- It is mandatory that all students carry approved health insurance for the duration of their exchange. Please be sure to arrange this before your exchange in consultation with the sponsor and host districts.
- Most likely you will be required to have immunization documentation. Check with your local health department and consular officials to determine required or recommended immunizations for the countries to which you are traveling.
- You may also need to have a thorough pre-exchange medical examination. With this examination, you may wish to obtain an identification card including your name, blood type, and medications you take or to which you are allergic. You should carry this card at all times while on the exchange.
- Your Rotary club counselor or host family may wish to examine your passport, visa, and airline tickets to confirm that your documents are in order. These may be retained by your Rotarian counselor or Youth Exchange officer to ensure their safety.





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### PACKING

Consider the following points when packing for your exchange:

#### Luggage

- Luggage should be light, sturdy, durable, easy to handle, and easy to close. Wheeled luggage is most helpful but not necessary.
- Place your name, home address, destination address, and telephone numbers on both the inside and outside of every piece of luggage.
- Pack less than you think you will need. You must be able to carry your luggage without assistance. Negotiating airports can involve walking long distances.
- Keep your carry-on baggage as light as possible. Pack only essential items, including any medications; for longer flights, basic toiletries should be added. To protect from pickpockets or accidental loss, wear a "safe pouch" inside your clothes that contains your passport, money, tickets, host family's and chair's telephone numbers, and other important papers.

- If medication is carried, ensure that you have original prescriptions to present to customs officials.

#### Clothes and Personal Items

- Pack coordinating clothes. Only bring what you know you *will* wear, not what you think you *might* wear.
- Bring your most comfortable pants or jeans. Your weight may fluctuate due to your new culture's food.
- Do not bring multiple pairs of dress shoes that you will probably not wear. If you need shoes, buy them in your host country and be right in style.
- If you wear glasses, bring an extra pair and a copy of your prescription.
- If you wear contact lenses, pack extra cleaning solution, as your brand may not be available or may be very expensive. Bring a copy of your prescription in case you need to replenish your supply of lenses or replace those lost or damaged.





## Miscellaneous

- Make sure you bring a journal or notebook to record daily events and activities, meals eaten, places visited, friends made, thoughts, or anything else you want to remember about your exchange for years to come.
- Consider bringing small gifts from your home country for your host family or host Rotary club. Gifts need not be expensive but should be representative of the area you are from.
- Airport security equipment can damage high-speed film (800-speed or higher) in checked and carry-on luggage.
- You are discouraged from taking computers or electronic games with you on your exchange. They can be easily lost or damaged and distract you from other activities that you should experience.
- You may need to take power adapters for any items requiring electrical current. However, they will need to be compatible with the electrical system used in your host country. Therefore, you may want to check with your host Rotarians before taking adapters from your home country.

- Remember, you do not need to carry your entire home library, music collection, or other such items, no matter how precious. On the other hand, photos to introduce your family, home, school, etc., require little luggage space and will be greatly appreciated by your host families and new friends.

## Practical Information

- Prepare for emergencies in consultation with the sponsor and host clubs and districts and your parents, so that you know whom to contact and how to contact them. This is important should you experience weather delays or miss your flight while traveling.
- Bring only a small amount of host country currency with you. Wait until you get into the country to exchange additional funds. Consult with your host Rotary club to determine the best methods to exchange for or access local currency.
- Leave some room in your luggage. You will buy things on your exchange and still have to return home with the same two suitcases and one carry-on bag.





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- Make sure you wear your Rotary blazer on the trip. There are most likely other students traveling at the same time and you will be able to make more connections.

## DURING THE EXCHANGE

Adjusting to the new culture will be one of the more memorable phases of your exchange experience. Here are some suggestions to ease this transition.

### Family Life

Your hosts are excited about your arrival and will make every effort to welcome you into the family — but please remember that it is up to you to accept their invitation.

Your open-mindedness and flexibility were some of the personal qualities the selection committee at home considered in accepting you into the program, and you should be prepared to exercise them to the fullest.

Be prepared to discuss the household rules with your host family. Some families do not expect much from exchange students, while others expect everyone to share in the tasks of bed-making, kitchen cleanup, and house cleaning. Your

acceptance of whatever may be assigned to you will make the exchange experience enjoyable for everyone involved, even if you are not used to doing certain chores at home. Consider these household chores as the opportunity to learn more about the day-to-day activities of the culture and try not to simply do the bare minimum.

### Changing Families

Most Rotary exchange students on the long-term program are required to live with more than one host family during the year. You will be informed of the specific requirements of your host club's program and should be prepared to make this adjustment. Changing families offers you the opportunity to gain a profound view of your host country's culture, while expanding your friendships and experiences. To ease the transition, your counselor may discuss with you any concerns about the adjustment. Make sure you remain flexible as you adjust to your new host family. Many of the same questions or concerns about household rules that arose during the beginning of your first host family experience will need to be discussed with each of your new host families.





## School

Most long-term exchanges require schooling for the exchangee. While host Rotary clubs and districts generally make the necessary tuition arrangements with the local secondary school, it is the student's responsibility to register for and regularly attend school in addition to taking studies seriously. Remember to be reasonable when registering for classes, as taking too many will be difficult while you adjust to a new culture.

Also, becoming acquainted with the school and its procedures early will help you feel comfortable participating in school activities. Host brothers and sisters can help, as well as the school's guidance counselor. Be sure you know how to go safely to and from school and how to get lunch off school grounds if needed.

## Getting Involved

As an exchange student, you should use every opportunity to become acquainted with your host community and nation through involvement in activities. For example, you may wish

to attend religious services of your faith or that of your host family and join in related activities. You are also encouraged to participate in school activities, but remember that your studies come first.

Before leaving on your exchange, consider the activities you enjoy in your home community, especially those that make you feel good about yourself. Include activities that have helped you adjust to new situations and succeed at home, such as exercise and sports, hobbies, and club affiliations. While you should not hesitate to try new experiences, enjoying activities that have made you happy in your everyday life at home will pave the way for a smooth transition.

## Your Rotary Obligations

Rotary obligations take precedence over other extracurricular activities. These obligations usually include attendance at Rotary functions such as club and/or district meetings and may involve giving a speech. Sharing your exchange experience with the host club or district is an important feature of the exchange and contributes to your role as a student ambassador.





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It is a good idea to attend Rotary club meetings early in your exchange as part of the acclimation process, so that you will feel comfortable speaking at these meetings later.

### COMMON ISSUES

While each exchange experience is unique, students face common problems, such as the following:

#### Language Proficiency

Regardless of your language preparation before the exchange, you will still need to adjust to speaking the language throughout every day. Be prepared for misunderstandings and frustrations that may accompany communication with your host family. Speak clearly and slowly and be patient.

Be sure you understand what your host family, Rotarians, or school officials are saying to you. Do not hesitate to ask for clarification and be prepared to go over some issues several times. Sometimes it may be necessary to seek help from someone fluent in your native language — a teacher, interpreter, or visitor from your home country. Carry a good dictionary.

### Homesickness

Most students experience varying degrees of homesickness during their exchange. It is normal to be homesick, especially at the beginning of your stay when everything is strange, or when the novelty and excitement begin to wear off. You may feel lonely, which is exacerbated if you experience problems. When day-to-day problems seem overwhelming you are likely to look nostalgically toward home.

The best remedies for acute homesickness are to keep busy with a variety of activities or get in contact with someone who speaks your native language. Also consider starting a new hobby or activity or join in other community functions. Your Rotarian and school counselors can help you cope with homesickness throughout your exchange.

#### Telephone and E-mail Use

While you may think phoning or e-mailing people in your home country will alleviate homesickness, try to limit these forms of contact. Telephone and data lines are often very expensive and it is impolite to abuse the generosity of your host family. In addition, constant contact with family and





friends could hinder your ability to fully assimilate into your host country's culture.

You should, however, correspond regularly with both your sponsor Rotary club and your parents. Let them know of any concerns and indicate whether they are serious or otherwise, because parents easily become anxious when their children are far from home. Tell them about your exchange, including any travel plans you have with your family or Rotary group. Also share your exciting experiences, as they will be happy to hear how much you are enjoying your exchange.

### Your Counselor

You may have problems during your exchange that cannot be resolved by you alone or your host family. If this occurs, you should speak to your Rotary-appointed counselor immediately. Host Rotary clubs will appoint an independent Rotarian, who is not a member of the host family, as your Youth Exchange counselor. Your Rotarian counselor can help you deal with any questions, concerns, or problems you have during your exchange. You should contact your counselor any time you need guidance about problems that you feel you cannot discuss

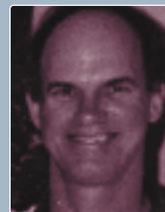
with your host family or other adults in the local program. In the unlikely event you have problems with your counselor, ask to meet with another Rotarian with whom you can discuss these matters.

School counselors can help you with academic concerns and any other school adjustment problems you might have. They may also be able to direct you to other resources to help you during your exchange.

Remember, your local Rotary club and school counselors are there to help you. However, you should always be sure to discuss anything that worries or confuses you with an adult you trust.

Rotary International has adopted a Statement of Conduct for Working with Youth (see inside back cover) to convey that Rotarians do not tolerate any kind of neglect or physical or sexual abuse and have an obligation to ensure your safety. If you encounter any behavior that makes you uncomfortable, inform an adult you trust immediately.





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## Early Return

There may be times when unsolvable problems arise, a student becomes too distressed for the exchange to continue, or a student breaks the agreed-upon rules. In these cases, the host Rotary club may decide that it is best for the student to return home early. While this is a difficult decision for a Rotary club to reach and students will naturally be anxious about the reactions of family and friends at home, it is usually in their best interest.

In these instances, it is vital that students and Rotarians cooperate and keep the lines of communication open. The host and sponsor clubs/districts, Rotarian counselor, host family, and student's family back home should all be kept fully informed of the circumstances surrounding an early return. The host Rotary club and the student's family should establish a mutually agreed-upon route for the student's return home, before his or her departure.

## AFTER THE EXCHANGE

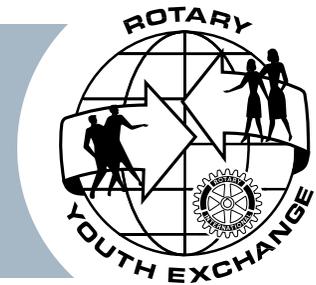
### Returning Home

For most students, the Youth Exchange experience does not end the moment they return home. The personal growth that most exchange students experience remains with them, often influencing the rest of their lives. Although you will be busy readjusting to family life for weeks or months, continued correspondence with your host families and new friends abroad will keep your new world view alive. Maintaining these important contacts will also help to ease your reentry orientation during this last phase of your exchange.

### Readjustment Difficulties

Your readjustment upon returning home is a crucial aspect of the exchange process. Just as you will have faced the challenge of adapting to the new culture, you may need help dealing with the feelings that accompany your return home. You will probably view your native culture, friends, and school life in a different light, and this is normal. Dealing with the difficulties of returning home is the culmination of your exchange. Here are a few ways to mitigate them:





- Recognize the thoughts you are feeling. They are normal and it is okay to find it difficult to slip back into your “old” life exactly as it used to be. You have changed and, therefore, your life at home will be different, too.
- Try to talk about your experiences during your exchange. Give a presentation to your host Rotary club, groups of interested students, or your classmates. You may also want to find other former exchange students who will relate to your experiences.
- Don’t be critical of your family if you have less freedom than you had when you were abroad.
- Be patient with yourself. Just as you took time to adjust to your new life in your host country, you will need time to readjust to your life at home.

Many local Rotary clubs or districts will offer reentry orientation as a part of the program, just as they provided you with predeparture orientation. Be sure to take advantage of any sessions that are offered.

In addition, you should contact your sponsor Rotary club upon your return and offer to visit the club and make a presentation

on your exchange experience. Also offer to assist the district Youth Exchange committee to help orient future outgoing exchange students.

Additionally, many former Youth Exchange students are active in ROTEX groups composed of program alumni who want to remain in contact with one another. They serve as a social and support group for students involved in the Youth Exchange program, and members often get together to share their exchange experiences.

Remember to discuss any questions with your local Rotary club and the Rotary Youth Exchange officers. You are beginning an adventure that will broaden your life, as it has done for the thousands of Rotary exchange students before you.

#### STATEMENT OF CONDUCT FOR WORKING WITH YOUTH

Rotary International is committed to creating and maintaining the safest possible environment for all participants in Rotary activities. It is the duty of all Rotarians, Rotarians’ partners, and any volunteers to safeguard to the best of their ability the welfare of and to prevent the physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of children and young people with whom they come into contact through Rotary.

