

SELECTION AND ORIENTATION

ROTARY YOUTH EXCHANGE (RYE) is open to students from ages 15-19 years. Youth exchange selection committees – both at home and abroad – carefully consider every applicant, balancing qualities like adaptability, language skills, and academic achievement, with the student’s commitment to Rotary’s goal of building international understanding. Exchange students are generally outstanding young men and women.

Prior to departure, all Rotary students participate in orientation sessions designed to acquaint them with both the expectations of the program and the normal emotional patterns of an exchange year. Even so, the student will arrive as a stranger in a strange land. Your job is to provide a supportive home environment and to help the student acclimate to life in the U.S. In this process, you should be open to learning about the student’s home culture, his or her life experience, and the common ground we share.

» First Steps

The first step to becoming a host family is to apply. The process includes a formal application, a background check, and an in-home interview. During that interview, you’ll cover the rules of the program and the support or resources available from your local club or the North Star Youth Exchange. For the most part, the rules are simple common sense guidance, much as you probably have for your own children. Some are intended to clarify expectations, while others are focused on avoiding legal or safety problems. For example, RYE students are prohibited from driving, even if they are of legal driving age and drive in their home countries.

Once approved, your Rotary club will provide more information about the schedule of program activities,

about local resources, and contact information for the club’s Youth Exchange Officer.

When a student is matched with you, please correspond to welcome him or her, and provide information about things like where he or she will stay in the house, seasonal clothing, and other practical things. You should also describe your family – who lives in the house, names, ages, jobs or schools, hobbies and interests, etc. If you have pets, please say so, as many cultures do not allow pets in the house and that would be good for your student to know in advance. Ask yourself what you’d like to know if you were about to move to a new country and into a house with strangers. Try to provide that kind of information.



A SHORT GUIDE FOR HOST FAMILIES

Hosting a student from another country is a challenging experience that enriches every member of your family.

By opening your hearts and home, you share in international understanding and fellowship.

TIME · EXPERIENCE NEW CULTURES THROUGH THE EYES OF A TEENAGER · CREATE GREAT MEMORIES · EXPAND THEIR WORLD · BE PART OF AN ADVENTURE · MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE · AN EXPERIENCE THAT ENRICHES EVERY FAMILY MEMBER · OPENING YOUR HEARTS AND HOME · SHARING AMERICAN CULTURE · CREATING FRIENDSHIPS TO LAST A LIFETIME

» Early Days

A Rotary delegation generally greets students on arrival at the closest airport. If a family member can be part of the delegation, that is the best. Remember that in-coming students may be exhausted from travel and nervous about meeting you. Allow him or her a little time to adjust before forming rigid first impressions or planning extensive activities.

» Family Adjustments

As you get settled, help your student know how to address you. “Mom” or “Dad” may seem unnatural, at least at first. Whatever you decide, it simply makes it easier for your student to talk with you. Other things to clarify early in the student’s stay with you:

- » Any food issues or concerns
- » Individual responsibility for household chores
- » Normal routines – meal times, bed times, study hours, regularly scheduled activities, etc.
- » Curfews and keys
- » Emergency contacts (both whom to call and what constitutes an “emergency”)
- » Local transportation
- » Religious preferences or services

Once in the home, be sure your student meets all family members and has a chance to settle into his or her living space. (It is acceptable for your student to share a room with one of your children, but each must have an individual bed.)



The details and nuances of family life will be absorbed over time, but a few minutes of plain talk early in the homestay will prevent unnecessary confusion or disagreement later on.

You should also be aware of and talk about Rotary’s expectations. At a minimum, your student will be expected to take school and school activities seriously.

If you have similar-age children in the home, encourage them to introduce your exchange student to their friends and to take him or her along to social events. Especially in the early days with the first family, it can take a little effort on everyone’s part to help the exchange student build a network of friends and acquaintances.

» School

Most Rotary exchange students are expected to enroll in an appropriate school full-time. Your sponsoring club will have made the necessary arrangements and paid any tuition or fees, but it is your responsibility to help the student take full advantage. Ironically, this often means counseling

a student not to over-enroll in academic courses. A balance of academic and extracurricular activities will usually provide the best exchange experience. Feel free to call on the school’s guidance counselors if you need help.

» Language

In the early days, particularly for the first host family, there may be some language barriers. In-bound students often speak multiple languages and have studied English, but they may not have much experience speaking. Take your time and enjoy the process of explaining the idiosyncrasies of the English language.

Aside from simply enjoying conversation, pay special attention to whether or not your student fully understands important things: school work, directions, time commitments, etc. Don’t hesitate to enlist the aid of a native speaker of your student’s language. He or she will enjoy the relaxation of speaking a familiar language now and then.

» Homesickness

It is almost inevitable that your student will experience occasional bouts of homesickness. This is absolutely normal and not a reflection on you, your family, or home life. Being on your own in a new country is exhausting. Time,

patience, and some gentle distraction will usually help. If the problem is persistent or seems to deepen, reach out to your local Rotary Club’s Youth Exchange Officer for guidance and help.

» Changing Host Families

One of the strengths of a Rotary Exchange is the student’s opportunity to experience life with two or three families. The first move may be a bit of a shock. The student will have formed a strong bond with the first family. It’s helpful for the first family to let the student and the second

family have a little get-acquainted time, then resume some social contact. The key is that everyone – student, first family, and second family – make a special effort to be understanding of the stress that can accompany this change.

» Rotary Obligations

Aside from creating a welcoming and supportive home environment for the student, the host family is also responsible for helping the student fulfill his or her Rotary obligations. Club members will help with transportation, but students often need host parent support in making and keeping a schedule, preparing presentations, and being available.

Students sometimes feel apprehensive about their language skills and may use that as an excuse to avoid public speaking obligations. Remind your student that Rotary audiences are very supportive. They are more interested in getting to know the student and his or her story, than they are with how fluently it is told.

Local clubs are genuinely excited about the students they host. Encourage your student to attend Rotary meetings as early and often as he or she can. It’s a great way to meet a wide range of friendly people and build a broader community.



Being a host family requires tact, sympathy, and patience, but in return it offers great rewards. It is an opportunity to develop a lifelong relationship that will enrich your family’s life for years to come.

Just keep in mind a few simple things:

- » Make your student feel like a part of the family
- » Be patient with language challenges
- » Encourage and support your student’s involvement in school and community life
- » Help your student balance his or her commitments and be sure he or she has time to develop friendships
- » Be accepting of differences and be open to challenging your own preconceptions

**OPEN YOUR HEART,
AND THE REST WILL FOLLOW.**