



TIPS FOR STAYING WITH AN AMERICAN FAMILY

Welcome to Columbus, Ohio! If this is your first visit to the United States, perhaps you have some concerns or questions about staying with an American family. We want your stay to be as enjoyable as possible, so we have put together a few brief guidelines for you. This may be the first time that your host family has had an international student in their home, so they may be a little nervous also! So relax, and be prepared to appreciate your differences. If your hosts sense that you are genuinely appreciative of their open home, any cultural mistakes or miscommunication will be overlooked.

Americans are very informal. They will want to know how to pronounce your first name, so you may want to write it down. They may ask you to call them by their first name, even if they are much older. This is what friends do! If you are not certain how to address them, just ask. Americans will also tell you to “make yourself at home”. This means they want you to feel a part of the family. Don’t be surprised if your host family wants to hug you when you come or when you leave – they simply want you to feel accepted!

Part of “making yourself at home” will mean that you will clean up after yourself! Very few Americans have maids or servants, so they will expect you to place your dirty dishes by the sink (or in the dishwasher), keep your room neat, and not leave your belongings around the house. Most American hosts work full-time, so this will be very helpful to them.

Before your first meal, be sure to tell your hosts if you have any dietary restrictions or allergies. They will be glad to accommodate you. If your host tells you to “go ahead and help yourself” at the table, your host will wait for you to take as much as you want from any dish, and then pass it to the next person. If you are asked if you want a drink, or want more food, do not answer “no” out of politeness. Americans will believe you! It is not rude to ask for a drink anytime, or for more food during dinner.

Most families do not smoke. Always step outside to smoke. Also, many families have pets inside the home, which may be treated like family members! If you are allergic to a pet, are afraid of a pet, or simply are uncomfortable with a pet, let your host know. Usually the pets can be kept elsewhere for a while.

If you brought pictures or other items from your country, your host family would be very interested in seeing them and hearing about your family and your home. Also, feel free to ask about your host’s family or other areas of interest to you. Americans are proud of their country, and they are usually open to questions about policies. However, they will also be honest if they disagree with your viewpoints; they are not meaning to offend you! Americans also like to joke. If you are uncomfortable with this, let your hosts know you don’t understand the joking.

It is usually NOT acceptable to ask about your hosts' ages, how much money they make, or why they have no children (if they have none). It is also not correct to ask for financial or legal help, or to ask for special favors such as sight-seeing. If your host offers, however, then it is fine to accept. It is always acceptable to ask about something you do not understand (like how the shower works), or something you need (like an extra blanket). Also, if you do not understand what your host has told you, you may ask as often as you need to.

Your hosts do not expect you to bring them a gift. They would be very happy to know that you appreciated your stay with them, and may want to keep in contact with you during the year. We hope you will enjoy your stay in an American home, and that this will be a happy memory for you!

Please note: All of our volunteer host families volunteer their time, their food, and their homes free of charge. They are not compensated in any way by IFI or by the students who stay with them. Our service is provided completely free and out of good will and hospitality based on the Bible's teaching, which tells us to be kind to strangers. Please be sure not to take advantage of their kindness.