



**Rotary International  
District 9700 Inc**

**Youth Exchange Committee**

**Host Family Handbook**

## **A PRIMER FOR HOST FAMILIES**

Hosting a Youth Exchange student from another country can be a wonderful experience. It allows a host family to become familiar with another culture and provides the opportunity to share a young student's hopes and ambitions. Youth Exchange promises to enrich the lives of the student and every member of your family.

This primer serves as a general introduction to the Rotary Youth Exchange program and an overview of host family responsibilities. Detailed information and any further questions you may have should be covered at an orientation session arranged by your local Youth Exchange program. Make sure you attend all of these important sessions. In this way you will fully understand what support systems are available to you and to the student, as well as understanding what you should expect as a host family in the Rotary Youth Exchange program and what the exchange student and program organizers expect of you.

## **INTRODUCTION**

District 9700 Inc participates in one of the two principal types of Rotary youth exchanges:

This is the **Long-term exchanges** which usually lasts an academic year in the host country, during which the student lives with three or four host families and attends school.

The District does not currently participate in the other programme, **Short-term exchanges**.

**Rotary clubs** are service organizations that 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. Membership represents a cross section of local business and professional leaders. 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**. The administration of a Rotary Youth Exchange program is a District to District programme with hosting arranged through clubs within the District. **Rotary International (RI)** is the association of Rotary clubs throughout the world.

Only Districts that comply with RI's certification standards may participate in exchanges. While RI encourages clubs and districts to undertake Youth Exchange activities and offers support through publications and suggested guidelines, Rotary Districts run their Youth Exchange programs independently of RI. Each year, Rotary

Districts worldwide arrange more than 7,000 international youth exchanges for secondary school students. A primary goal of the program is to foster world understanding through intercultural exchange.

### **Student Selection**

Rotary Youth Exchange students are of secondary school age and generally accepted into the program if they are able to demonstrate an above-average academic record and involvement in extracurricular activities. It is standard practice for local Rotary clubs and districts to screen young people using detailed applications and interviews. This process seeks to ensure that only highly responsible and mature students are sent on an exchange. Program administrators in the student's home country generally assess an applicant's scholastic record, linguistic ability, and general adaptability, among other qualities. Disabled students are encouraged to apply for both long- and short-term exchanges.

### **Rules**

Each club or district program has its own specific rules for students to follow. Where students are accepted into an exchange they must agree to abide by a list of program rules which they sign before their departure from home. While the student's host Rotary club will provide you with RI and District rules and discuss these program rules with both you and the student, you should review the rules with the student to be sure that everyone has a clear understanding of what is expected. Allow the student to discuss any needs or expectations with you any time during the exchange. The program rules generally consist of commonsense stipulations, such as no driving of motor vehicles, no illegal use of drugs or alcohol, and the need to obtain special permission for travel outside of the local area while on the exchange. Limitations also apply on travelling with P Plate drivers. In addition, any romantic involvement during the exchange is discouraged (although companionship in accordance with cultural standards is encouraged). Sexual activity is strictly banned and no tattoo or body piercings is permitted. Host families should not waive any rules without consulting the Host Club Counsellor and/or District Committee Country Co-ordinator for your student as precedents and inconsistent decisions impact on all students in the programme.

### **Rotary Club and District Responsibilities**

**The sponsor Rotary club or district** in the student's home country will:

- Inform the host club or district of the student's travel itinerary and arrange outbound orientation.
- Maintain contact with the exchange student and the host district and club during the exchange.
- Arrange suitable debriefing for the exchange student when changing host families and upon his or her return from overseas

**The host Rotary club will:**

- Screen all volunteers and host families before their participation in the program. The screening will include an application process, announced and unannounced home visits, and one or more interviews conducted by Rotarians. You will be required to provide references and agree to background checks for all household adults before being selected as a host.
- Meet the student on arrival.
- Arrange enrolment, tuition, and other educational matters with the local secondary school (for long-term exchanges).
- Conduct inbound orientation.
- Facilitate discussion of needs and expectations between you and the student, and organize some social and cultural functions for the student.
- Appoint a Rotarian counsellor and arrange a bank account and monthly allowance for the student.
- Maintain contact with the student and host families during the exchange through the Rotarian counsellor, who is not a member of the student's host family or their immediate social circle.

The Host Club Counsellor is the main Host Family contact and will attend to most of the above tasks.

**Host Family Responsibilities**

While exchange students tend to be academic achievers with more developed coping skills than many teenagers, they are vulnerable, living in an unfamiliar country, and often functioning in a non native language. You as a host have the most important responsibilities to make the exchange a success. Host families are to provide a safe, nonthreatening, respectful, and appropriate environment in which trust and friendship between you and the student can develop. To emphasize the host family's important role, Rotary International has adopted a Statement of Conduct for Working with Youth (see back cover) that must be understood and followed by all participants in the program. Host families should maintain close contact with the host Rotary Club Counsellor so that any problems may be addressed and resolved quickly. In addition, the exchange student should always have free access to his or her counsellor to talk about any concerns or problems during the exchange.

## **PREPARING TO HOST**

Hosting a student can be extremely rewarding for all members of your family, and being a well prepared and involved host family will only enhance everyone's experience. Ask the local Rotary club or district for specific information. Some anxiety is expected if you have never hosted an exchange student, but be sure you are comfortable with the idea before doing so. If you have serious reservations about hosting, feel that you cannot meet your obligations, or do not have adequate answers to your questions, you should not agree to host. Below are some insights on what to expect before and during the exchange.

### **Preparing for the Exchange Student's Arrival**

While the exchange student's sponsor and host Rotary clubs will be taking care of most of the logistics of the exchange, there are some ways you can prepare for the student's arrival. Consider whether you are familiar enough with the student's culture to understand any differences that may arise. If not, do some general research on the Internet or at the library. The local Rotary club may also be able to give you further information. As soon as the student's name and contact information are known, the host family should contact the exchange student and his or her parents. The easiest way to do this is to obtain the student's e-mail address from the Host Club Counsellor. You should extend a welcome to the student, including information about your family, i.e., how many members, their ages, hobbies, etc.; the type of clothing required for the climate if the student has not yet left home; the local community or school; and other considerations. In short, ask yourself what you would like to know about a new home in a foreign culture and supply that kind of information.

### **Meeting Your Exchange Student and Making Introductions**

Although the host Rotary Club Counsellor will be at the airport to meet the student on arrival, a member of the student's first host family should also be in the welcoming delegation. Please keep in mind that the student will likely be very tired upon arrival and may need several days to recover from jet lag, or fatigue, from adjusting to the duration of travel and time difference. Many host Rotary clubs hold a social event to start this process of introductions early in the exchange. This should be held not earlier than a few days after arrival. Events held earlier have no lasting value to the student as the travel and culture shock prevent any meaningful interaction. Rotary International has produced a list of "Sample Questions to

Ask Your Host Family” for the students and host families to discuss early in the student’s stay. The Host Club Counsellor will provide these or you may visit the Download section on the RI Web site at

<http://www.rotary.org/EN/STUDENTSANDYOUTH/YOUTHPROGRAMS/ROTARYYOUTHEXCHANGE/Pages/FirstNightQuestions.aspx> The questionnaire can be generated with dual language versions for most exchange languages. This is very useful in minimising misunderstanding.

### **Orientation and Adaptation**

Exchange students will receive formal orientation from the district before and/or after arrival in the host country. But no matter how thorough the orientation, the student comes into the first host family as a stranger in a strange land, possibly encountering a strange language, a strange accent, or different use of words. The exchange may even be the student’s first long trip away from home. One way to ensure that the exchange student adapts as smoothly as possible is to realize that you and the student will have misconceptions about each other’s cultures. What you consider to be ill-mannered or unacceptable behaviour may be the norm in the student’s culture and vice versa. Please be aware that these misapprehensions can lead hosts to attribute inaccurate motives to the student’s actions.

Another way to aid your visitor’s adjustment is to share your culture with him or her as it exists in everyday life. This does not mean that you need to arrange elaborate entertainment. Simply make the student a part of your family with the opportunity to share in the same aspects of family life experienced by most teenage students in your culture. Try to treat the student as a member of your family and not as a guest. Also, treat the student as you would want your own child treated on an exchange. It is desirable to have the student address the host parents with an informal title, such as “mum” or “dad” or by another appropriate name, to encourage the student to be part of the family. Developing this sort of relationship with the student early on will help ensure a smooth and successful homestay.

In spite of these considerations, the host family may not be able to resolve the student’s feelings of homesickness or adequately address difficulties the student may have. A key element of the student’s orientation program should be an explanation of the network that is in place. This network includes the host country counsellor, school counsellors, District Youth Exchange officers, club members, and the student’s own family. Be sure the student knows how to contact each of these people, and do not feel

threatened if the student feels unable to discuss problems with you. This broad support network ensures that there is always someone the student can feel comfortable approaching if a concern or problem arises. However, students should be able to contact their parents more frequently than usual if a problem or concern is not easily resolvable.

### **General Family Arrangements**

For the first 4 to 7 days the student should reside with the counsellor. In this way a meaningful relationship and level of confidence can be developed before moving to the first host family.. The length of stay with your family should have been determined before the student's arrival. The student should have his or her own bedroom or share a room with another young person of the same gender and a similar age. The student must, however, have his or her own bed and appropriate privacy to dress and bathe. A place should also be designated in the house that allows the student to study in privacy. In addition to providing room and board, host parents are expected to exercise general parental supervision, as would the student's own parents. It is also the host parents' responsibility to notify the student's Rotarian counsellor if the student is encountering any exceptional problems such as illness, difficulty in adapting to the host family or school, anxieties about family matters or relationships at home, or serious homesickness. Open communication with everyone involved is necessary in creating a safe atmosphere for the student and host family. The student should be encouraged to voice and address his or her concerns at any time. It is wise to avoid misunderstandings by discussing the following issues and household rules from the start:

- Student responsibilities for household tasks, such as cleaning his or her room and helping with meals, as expected with one's own children
- Normal household routines: laundry arrangements, meal and retirement times, study hours, etc.
- Curfews
- House keys
- Explanation of emergency telephone numbers and procedures
- Information about local transportation (maps are useful)
- Religious practices
- Reasonable use of telephone and computer

### **SOME PRIMARY ISSUES FACING EXCHANGE STUDENTS**

Although most exchange students are mature, they are still teenagers. Host families should consider this in dealing with the student during his or her stay. As the host family, you are the first

point of contact for the student during the exchange. Should any serious problems occur, report them to the student's counsellor immediately to discuss the situation and determine the best resolution. Voice any questions or concerns you may have — even seemingly insignificant ones — to the student's counsellor or host Rotary club president or District Youth Exchange Country Co-ordinator. While each exchange experience is unique, most students face certain issues at some point during an exchange, such as the following. Any sustained difficulties, or concerns for wellbeing must be advised promptly to the District Committee Chair as well as the contacts mentioned above..

### **Language Proficiency**

During their initial days together, students and host family members will become aware of any language problems that exist. Some students will have studied the host country's language before arrival, sometimes to a considerable extent.

Others may be required to take an additional language class upon their arrival. The knowledge gained from books, however, does not prepare one for daily language use. Be prepared for any slight misunderstandings and frustrations that may accompany communication with the student. Remember that listening and speaking in a different language is mentally very demanding and students will become tired quickly. Speak clearly and slowly and be patient. Make every effort to see that the student understands what is being said about house rules, geographical directions, and other matters. Keep in mind that the frustration of communicating in an unfamiliar language may lead an embarrassed student to indicate he or she has understood some thing when such is not the case. Conversely, hosts should be sure that they understand what the student is telling them, and they should not hesitate to ask for clarification. Be prepared to go over some issues several times. On occasion it may be necessary to seek help from someone fluent in the student's native language — a teacher, interpreter, or visitor from the student's home country.

### **Homesickness**

Language problems, if present, often coexist with a phenomenon that nearly all exchange students face sooner or later: homesickness. After the novelty and excitement of the early stages of an exchange wear off, the student may suddenly feel alone in a strange place. This is a normal reaction. Homesick students may consider many day-to-day problems overwhelming and look nostalgically toward home. Acute homesickness can be devastating. The best remedies may include contact with someone

who speaks the student's native language and a full program of activities. A side trip to some point of interest or simply a social event can help, as well as encouraging the student to develop hobbies and join in other community functions. For long-term exchanges, the student's Rotary counsellor or school counsellor can help if the home sickness persists. Parental visits during the exchange are strongly discouraged. They may not occur without the prior approval of both the Sponsor and Host District Chair.

### **Medical Concerns**

You should be informed of any special medical needs the student may have, including medications, allergies, or prescription eyewear (glasses or contact lenses). The host Rotary club or district will have the student's recent medical history along with his or her application materials. Students will have a Medibank Private Overseas Student Health card and also a Travel and Medical Insurance policy. You should have a copy of this policy and any additional medical documentation while the student resides in your home. Where possible the same Doctor should be utilised throughout the student's exchange.

### **Dietary Concerns**

Students may have special dietary needs related to health, religion, or personal preference. These considerations should always be respected. Many foods in the host country may be new or seem strange to the student. Encourage students to try new dishes, but be accommodating to their preferences and do not force foods upon them.

### **School Concerns**

The student visa requires the student to maintain an 80% attendance at school with a satisfactory performance level. While host Rotary clubs and districts make the necessary tuition arrangements with the local secondary school, host parents should see that the student gets started on the right foot. The Host Club Counsellor will visit the school with the exchange student to arrange enrolment, uniforms and the study program. Be aware that exchange students sometimes feel obligated to assume an almost impossible academic load. Encourage the student against taking too many classes while adjusting to the new school. The student may also need your guidance to become acquainted with school procedures, particularly if accustomed to a radically different school system. Host brothers and sisters can help the school counsellor provide assistance in this area. Be sure the student knows the way to and from school and what arrangements apply regarding lunch.

## **Changing Families**

Most long-term exchange students live with three to four different host families during the school year. This exposes the students to a variety of family life in the host country and allows them to better understand the culture as a whole. It is important that both the hosts and the exchange student realize at the outset the limited duration of each stay with a host family. The first change of families will probably be the most upsetting for the student, as he or she will have established a good rapport with the family that aided in overcoming the initial culture shock. As a result, the exchange student should ideally be introduced to his or her next host family early in the exchange. It is often a good idea to arrange for the new host family to pick up the student at the previous family's home to ease the transition from one to another, and for the previous families to make occasional visits. If the student is having difficulty changing families, offer him or her words of sympathetic understanding, couched in terms of a broadening of opportunity. Guidance from the Rotarian counsellor, an understanding teacher, or a representative of the individual's religion can help smooth the transition. Host families are encouraged to pass on details of friends, networks and social routine and sporting commitments the student has developed. If there are any issues such as excessive telephone accounts outstanding, the counsellor should be informed promptly.

## **Exchange Student's Rotary Obligations**

Hosts are encouraged to help their student meet Rotary obligations, which 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. The student will have four District commitments through the year and usually participate in the student Safari over three weeks in May/June. Host Counsellor will be able to provide the dates for the District commitments and the Safari dates are usually available about 6 months prior. The student's sharing of the exchange experience with the host club or district is an important feature of the exchange and contributes to the student's ambassadorial role. Hosts should be aware of Rotary obligations from the start and factor them into the student's overall adjustment process. Be aware, for example, that the student will need time to adjust to the new culture and language before being required to speak at a Rotary function. It is a good idea for the student to attend Rotary club meetings early in the exchange as part of the familiarization

process, so that he or she will feel comfortable speaking at these meetings later.

Students should not be permitted to decline speaking at Rotary meetings with the excuse that he or she is “not a public speaker.” The student is not expected to be an experienced orator. Audiences are interested in seeing the student and hearing his or her reactions to the culture, not the polished delivery of a speech. Non-Rotarian host families may also want to consider participating with the student in these Rotary functions. This type of support may go a long way in making the student feel more comfortable at Rotary events.

The student is required to submit a written report to District Country Co-ordinator (with cc to District Chair) not later than last day each month.

The student may not travel outside the District or undertake special activities such as abseiling, scuba diving or light aircraft travel without the approval of the District Chair. Application forms are used which require acknowledgement and consent from a number of club persons as well as host families before the application form is forwarded to the District Country Co-ordinator. The Club may require this for travel within the District. Applications should be submitted early to allow all parties to be contacted with undue urgency.

### **SUMMARY**

**The District Committee** is responsible for;

- liaising with the sponsor District and Host Club;
- delivering support and monitoring compliance with RI Certification requirements;
- providing training and supplementary support to the exchange student.

**The Host Club** is responsible for:

- arranging hosting of the student;
- providing immediate support to the student and the host family and school;
- engaging the student in club and community activities.

**The Host Family** responsibility during an exchange can be summarised as follows:

- Meet your exchange student on arrival in your country, and make him or her feel at home as part of the family.
- Treat the student as you would wish a member of your family to be treated while living abroad.
- Ensure that the student is in a safe, respectful, and appropriate environment at all times.

- Involve the student in chores, responsibilities, and activities similar to those of your own family members.
- Monitor the student's performance at school.
- Help the student master your language.
- Encourage the student to meet other young people.
- Protect the student from outside demands to allow him or her time to accept Rotary obligations.
- Be tolerant of differences and willing to change your own ideas. The responsibility of hosting an exchange student is not complicated, but does require understanding, compassion, and patience. The rewards of hosting a student through your local Rotary Youth Exchange program are great. They include expanded views, international understanding, and the development of long term friendships, to name a few. Additional information about hosting an exchange student in your community is available from your local Rotary club or district. Congratulations on your decision to enrich your life, while making a world of difference in the life of an exchange student.

### **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.

