



A year in a life. A life in a year.

Rotary Youth Exchange: Host Family FAQ

Overview

Since 1929, Rotary Youth Exchange has been the world's longest-running exchange program, briefly interrupted only during WWII and the COVID-19

pandemic. Each year, about 9,000 students are hosted by Rotary Clubs worldwide, immersing themselves in new cultures, languages, and experiences while living with host families. Currently, District 5280 is seeking host families for the 2025-26 exchange year.

Hosting an exchange student is a fulfilling experience that offers meaningful impact for both student and family, creating lifelong connections.

Becoming a Host Family

1. What is the Exchange Duration and Host Family Commitment?

- **Typical Duration:** Exchange students typically spend one academic year abroad (approximately 10 months). However, to create a diverse experience, Rotary usually divides the student's time between three different host families, with each family committing to about three months.
- **Why Three Host Families?** This arrangement enriches the student's understanding of local culture, as they experience varying family dynamics and traditions. It also allows families to share the hosting commitment, easing the burden and ensuring additional support if needed. For example, if one family has to leave town, another can step in, creating a supportive network for the student.
- **Example of Flexibility:** One host family might introduce the student to local sports, while another may take them on family trips or cultural excursions. This variety provides the student with a well-rounded view of life in their host country.

2. Is My Home Suitable for an Exchange Student?

- **Basic Requirements:** The student needs a private bed in a room with a door that closes, and may share a room with a same-gender host sibling. The room should include a desk, and the student should have access to shared bathroom facilities, laundry, and kitchen access.

- **Routine Adjustments:** Every family has different routines; some host families may prefer to handle laundry for the household, while others may ask the student to do their own. This flexibility helps the student adapt to various customs and learn independence.
- **Home Inspection:** A Rotary Youth Exchange representative, trained by the State Department, will conduct a home inspection to ensure the environment is suitable and meets the program's standards. This adds a layer of safety and reassurance for both the host family and the student.

3. What About Household Chores?

- **Participating as a Family Member:** Exchange students are encouraged to take part in regular family responsibilities, similar to other household members. For instance, a student might help clear the table after dinner, take out the trash, or assist with cooking occasionally.
- **Limits to Chores:** The student is not expected to handle significant household responsibilities. For example, they might help babysit for a short time while parents run errands but should not be left to care for siblings for extended periods. Tasks like mowing the lawn or house cleaning should be shared or handled as a family.
- **Example of Daily Chores:** A student may be expected to keep their room tidy, do their laundry, and contribute to weekly chores like vacuuming or setting the table. This involvement helps students become part of the family, without overburdening them.

4. Who Can Be a Host Family?

- **Eligibility and Backgrounds:** Host families can come from diverse backgrounds and do not need to be Rotary members. The program is open to families of all types, including:
 - Parents with young or teenage children
 - Empty-nesters
 - Single individuals or single parents
 - Retirees or couples without children
 - LGBTQ+ families
- **Application and Training:** Host families undergo interviews, background checks, and cultural sensitivity training. For example, a retired couple hosting for the first time may receive training on teenage interests and communication tips to help ease the transition.
- **Support Network:** Rotary's extensive support system ensures host families are never alone. Each family is matched with a Rotary counselor who provides guidance, checks in regularly, and assists with any concerns or adjustments.

5. Who Are the Exchange Students?

- **Diverse Backgrounds and Countries:** Exchange students in the Southern California/Arizona/Nevada/Hawaii region (SCANEX) often come from Western Europe, Scandinavia, Japan, Taiwan, and Latin America. These students are selected through a competitive process and have demonstrated maturity, adaptability, and English proficiency.
- **High Standards of Conduct:** Rotary's emphasis on character development aligns with its mission to promote peace and understanding. Students are held to high standards, expected to engage with kindness, curiosity, and a service-minded attitude. A student who struggled initially with English, for instance, may find encouragement through the supportive family environment, building confidence and fluency over time.

- **Continuous Counseling:** Students have access to a Rotary counselor, who ensures they adapt positively, make friends, and meet behavioral expectations. These regular check-ins provide students with a trusted mentor and a resource for any challenges.

6. What Does It Cost to Host an Exchange Student?

- **No Payment to Host Families:** Hosting is voluntary, with no financial compensation, as Rotary's mission focuses on service. The hosting Rotary Club provides the student with a small monthly stipend (typically around \$100) to cover personal expenses like school supplies or meals with friends.
 - **Cost Coverage:** The student's family is responsible for their major expenses, including airfare, school supplies, and insurance. Host families are asked to cover only minor expenses, such as an occasional family outing or meal.
 - **Budgeting Together:** For example, if the host family plans a special outing like a theme park trip, they can discuss costs with the student beforehand. Some families may cover such expenses, while others may offer guidance on budgeting.
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Benefits of Hosting

The Rewards

- **Rediscovering Your Community:** Hosting an exchange student often encourages families to explore local attractions, try new activities, or share traditions. This might mean finally visiting a local museum, taking a family hike, or sharing a favorite family recipe. These activities create bonding moments and help students experience local culture.
- **Creating Lifelong Connections:** Many host families stay in touch with their exchange students for years, attending graduations, weddings, or significant milestones. A host parent might even travel to their student's home country, strengthening these intercultural ties.

The Challenges

- **Occasional Disruptions:** While rare, exchanges can be cut short if a student fails to follow program rules or struggles with cultural adaptation. Rotary ensures open-ended return tickets, so students can be returned home if necessary. Counselors are trained to address issues early and provide resources to avoid these situations.
 - **Student Effort:** An exchange requires commitment from the student. They are expected to embrace new language skills, make friends, and participate actively. These standards ensure the program remains a positive, rewarding experience for both the student and host family.
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Final Thoughts

Hosting a Rotary exchange student has a ripple effect that extends beyond the immediate family, fostering cultural understanding, empathy, and lifelong connections. In a world that often feels divided, this exchange brings young people face-to-face with new perspectives, customs, and values. If you are interested, feel free to reach out—time is of the essence to prepare for the upcoming exchange year!

Yours in Rotary Service,

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Rotary Youth Exchange: Counselor FAQ

Role of the Counselor vs. Youth Exchange Officer (YEO)

Counselor: Each exchange student has a club-appointed counselor who serves as their primary support, offering guidance on cultural adjustments, school experiences, and family dynamics. Counselors ensure students feel connected, safe, and understood, meeting monthly (in person if possible) to check on well-being.

Examples:

- **Cultural Adjustments:** A student may struggle to adapt to mealtime schedules or food customs. The counselor can provide tips on how to discuss these preferences respectfully or encourage patience in adjusting.
- **School Challenges:** If a student feels isolated or overwhelmed by school, the counselor may suggest joining extracurriculars, where they can build friendships and practice language skills.

Youth Exchange Officer (YEO): The YEO manages program logistics, compliance, and escalates unresolved issues. They have the authority to terminate an exchange if severe violations occur, ensuring program integrity.

Examples:

- **Unresolved Family Conflict:** If a student faces ongoing household issues that the counselor cannot resolve, the YEO may intervene.
- **Rule Violations:** If a student violates a significant rule, like drug or alcohol use, the YEO initiates early return processes.

Each exchange student is assigned their own counselor. The counselor is a member of the sponsoring Rotary club and will be of the same sex as the exchange student. The counselor is required to check in on the exchange student about once a month or more often if needed. The counselor keeps tabs on the well-being of the exchange student and is there to serve as a resource and person to whom the exchange student can turn.

The Youth Exchange Officer oversees the program from the District level and is responsible for all exchange students—inbound and outbound—for the year. The Youth Exchange Officer also counsels and keeps tabs on the general well-being of the exchange students. However, because the Youth Exchange Officer sometimes lives far away and because he/she has several students under his/her purview at once, an individual counselor living in the student's town is assigned to each student. Furthermore, the Youth Exchange Officer may be a different gender than the exchange student and the exchange student may feel more comfortable discussing some matters with someone of the same sex. The Youth Exchange Officer is a resource for the host family and the exchange student much like the counselor is, however, the Youth Exchange Officer is usually only called in when a situation escalates or does not resolve satisfactorily. The Youth Exchange Officer has "the power of the plane ticket" and will end an exchange early if need be. Because the Youth Exchange Officer needs to decide for the benefit and future of the entire program, his or her thinking on matters and subsequent decision making may require him or her to

implement “zero tolerance”. Therefore, the “grey areas” are best handled by the host parents and the counselor before escalating to the Youth Exchange Officer.

Confidentiality Standards

Counselors build trust by maintaining confidentiality, sharing information only when necessary with the YEO or district.

Examples:

- Preferences and Discomforts: A student uncomfortable with pets or food may share this with the counselor, who could offer advice on how to communicate these feelings in a way that respects cultural norms.
- School-Related Stress: A student anxious about school may open up to the counselor, who could then offer support strategies or guidance.

Serious issues like harassment, bullying, or abuse must be reported immediately to the YEO.

Counselors provide a **monthly status report**, which is uploaded into a central system.

The counselor is to be a trusted person and someone in whom the student can confide and speak freely and openly without fear of the conversation being shared. Anything of a minor nature said in confidence should be kept between the counselor and the exchange student (“My host dad chews with his mouth open.” or “My host mom leaves her toenail clippings in the sink.” “These people hardly ever dust and my allergies are killing me.”). Every host city, no matter how large, is a *small town*: Gossip travels fast and whatever is said in gossip will get back to the host family eventually. Discretion is advised. Furthermore, the counselor may have access to privileged and private information, such as the student’s medical history, grades or family situation. All of these things should be kept **confidential**. It’s nobody’s business if an exchange student takes antidepressants or if his/her parents have fallen on hard times. **For more serious matters, particularly matters where the counselor has any indication whatsoever of harassment, abuse, or other serious matter, that is an all hands-on-deck situation and the counselor is to call the Youth Exchange Officer and other Youth Exchange resources as soon as possible.**

Monthly Reporting

Monthly reports track each student’s progress, enabling early intervention if issues arise.

Reports include:

- Emotional Well-Being: Counselors note any signs of homesickness, mood changes, or withdrawal.
- Academic and Social Progress: Observing the student’s grades, attendance, and extracurricular involvement.

For instance, if a student is withdrawn or struggling socially, this could be a sign of adjustment difficulties, prompting the YEO to provide additional resources.

Host families

Rotary welcomes all types of families to be host families:

- Parents with children at home
- Single people and single parents
- Divorced parents with shared custody
- Same-sex and LGBTQIIA+ couples
- Retired people and “empty nesters”
- People of any religious, ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds

Host parents will undergo an interview and a criminal background check. In addition, host parents will undergo cultural sensitivity training and youth protection training.

Types of Concerns Counselors Should Watch For

Host Family Issues:

- **Family Dynamics:** A student who feels unwelcome by host siblings may need support in building rapport, or the counselor may mediate a discussion with the family.
- **Household Expectations:** Students sometimes find household chores excessive if they don't align with Rotary guidelines. The counselor can clarify expectations and set limits if necessary.

School Concerns:

- **Academic and Attendance Issues:** If a student's grades drop, the counselor can encourage study habits or tutoring. School-related stress can often signal homesickness or cultural adjustment.
- **Lack of Social Engagement:** Students who avoid clubs or sports may need encouragement to explore new interests or join school activities, promoting social integration.

Peer-Related Issues:

- **Social Isolation:** If a student reports loneliness, the counselor might suggest ways to connect, such as Rotary events or sports.
- **Problematic Friendships:** If a student associates with peers who engage in risky behavior, the counselor can gently encourage positive friendships while reinforcing Rotary's conduct rules.

Household Courtesy and Mindfulness:

- Students may be unaccustomed to certain norms, such as punctuality to family events, showing gratitude, cleaning up after themselves or respecting quiet hours. While they may not actively defy expectations, these patterns can be addressed through guidance on cultural norms and family rules.

In these cases, the term “misalignment of expectations” often fits better than “insubordination,” as students are typically navigating new social cues rather than intentionally breaking rules. This gradual buildup of small cultural misunderstandings is a “death by a thousand cuts” to an exchange.

Examples of Microaggressions toward the student:

- Subtle Insults or Stereotypes: A student might repeatedly face jokes about their home country, or their accent, which can be demoralizing even if meant in jest.
- Cultural Misunderstandings: Host family members or peers might make assumptions about the student's customs or lifestyle, such as implying they're unfamiliar with certain foods or activities.
- Exclusion from Activities: If a student is often left out of plans because of assumptions about their background, this exclusion can affect their self-esteem and sense of belonging.

Examples of Microaggressions from the student:

Student makes generalizations about Americans (“All Americans are fat and lazy.” “Americans are so stupid. School is so easy.”)

Student consistently compares things from the home country and insists the American counterpart is worse (“American food is greasy and full of preservatives. We only eat healthy food in Germany.”)

Counselors should watch for these subtle yet impactful behaviors and advocate for the student's inclusion and understanding in the host community.

Types of concerns the counselor should keep an eye out for:

Problems with the host family:

- Host sibling rivalries
- Too many household chores assigned to exchange student
- Exchange student is messy, inconsiderate of house cleanliness rules
- Exchange student remains secluded from host family

- Exchange student spends too much time on phone communicating back home and on social media
- Exchange student is a picky eater and/or host family's dietary habits are inconsistent with the exchange student's (too “healthy” or “unhealthy” etc.).
- Exchange student doesn't respect curfews set by host parents
- Maintaining healthy boundaries and being culturally sensitive
- Exchange student spending too much time in his room
- Exchange student sleeping too much
- Exchange students seeing this year as “vacation” and taking non-Rotary trips
- Visits from natural parents and friends from home country
- Exchange student “raiding” refrigerator, taking very long showers, using up supplies
- General discourteous behavior (loud music, rude comments, etc.)

Problems at school:

- Poor attendance and too many “sick” days
- No participation in extracurricular activities
- Failing grades (We like to see exchange students maintain a C average. Clearly, a non-English speaker will likely fail a few tests along the way. But the students need to try and must do homework assigned)

Problems with peers:

- Failure to find a peer group and social isolation
- A peer group that may be questionable and may encourage poor decision-making
- Bullying

Anywhere, any time with anyone:

- Verbal, physical, emotional harassment and abuse, bullying, sexual harassment, assault and abuse.

What about household chores?

The student may engage in household chores as would be expected of all members of the family. For example, a student may go on the rotating dishwashing list. He can be expected to make his bed, keep his room dusted, vacuumed and tidy and change his bedsheets. He can do his own laundry and set the table. However, the student is **not a nanny nor a maid**. Watching younger host siblings while host parents run an errand for a couple hours? Sure. Babysitting younger host siblings all weekend while the host parents attend an out-of-town conference? *No*. Helping to pull weeds once in a while with other family members? Yes. Weekly mowing, trimming, raking by himself? *No*.

The counselor should try and gauge both whether the exchange student is perhaps being asked to take on too many household chores, as well as if he is not pulling his weight as part of the family.

Food and eating

The counselor should make a mental note of the exchange student's general weight over the exchange year. Exchange students tend to gain weight during their exchange. The change in diet coupled with generally heightened stress levels from being in a new environment will raise cortisol levels and the pounds tend to pack on. Plus, the students are often invited to food-related events and host parents like to impress with lots of rich cooking. Five, ten, even fifteen extra pounds are to be expected. On the other hand, a significant weight gain or loss accompanied by an unusually reserved manner or negative disposition may signal something that needs addressing.

The exchange student may be a picky eater, which is often a source of contention between host parents and exchange students. Significant weight gain is also an indication of a picky eater, as the exchange student may be buying unhealthy snacks and fast food on his own. Significant weight loss coupled with excessive exercise and/or long periods of time spent in the bathroom may be signs of an eating disorder and these suspicions should be addressed with the YEO so that experts may be called in if needed.

As a counselor, weight gain and loss will be a touchy subject to broach. The counselor should not make **any** comments aloud about a student's weight or body to the student or the host family directly. The counselor may consider asking the exchange student something like, "What's your favorite food you have had here so far?" If they answer quickly and with enthusiasm ("I love hot chicken sandwiches!" or "Homemade pizza night with my little host brothers is the best!") that is a good sign. If, however, the exchange student answers negatively and in generalities ("Nothing, really." "Everything is so full of fat and tasteless."), that could signal a problem. Similarly, if the student responds with a complaint to this question, especially when adding the adjective "American", this can signal homesickness or another reason the exchange is not proceeding successfully ("American bread is just fluff and completely tasteless." "American pizza isn't real pizza." "Americans think orange chicken is real Chinese food." etc.).

Cultural and Socioeconomic factors

Students are often placed in a home which will differ in ways big and small from what he/she is used to, and the counselor should listen carefully to any opinions expressed. Rotary Youth Exchange has one overarching mission and that mission is **peace**. If an exchange student expresses even a slight dislike associated with a religion, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation (a so-called “micro-aggression”, “a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority”), that signals a prejudice that he likely brought with him from home into the exchange. Within the host home, those prejudices will be felt and can lead to conflict or discomfort. But they can also lead to the opportunity for learning and tolerance. Similarly, host families may come face to face with their own prejudices when living with a young person of a different culture, ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Another situation that may cause conflict is a difference in socio-economic status. Very generally speaking, some exchange students from overseas tend to come from more affluent families. They may be accustomed to maids, for example, and may have never folded a piece of laundry or put a dish in the dishwasher in their entire life. The counselor should support the exchange student in adjusting to “normal American life” and help him understand that loading a dishwasher and making their own bed are **important life skills** the student is learning that will benefit him/her throughout his/her life. Conversely, exchange students from less affluent backgrounds may have to learn a thing or two about not putting crystal stemware in the dishwasher, not placing feet on the antique coffee table and not putting cashmere sweaters in the washing machine. Also, some exchange students come from countries with stricter gender roles and some exchange students may need some gentle coaching in basic household tasks that in their home countries traditionally belong to one gender.

Resolving conflicts and matters requiring attention

Ideally, issues can be resolved between host parents and the exchange student. If the area of conflict remains, it should be escalated to the counselor **before** resentment begins to fester. Such matters and action items should be documented in the monthly report and followed up on in the next month’s report.

If the counselor requires support to resolve the issue, the counselor should contact the Youth Exchange Officer. The Youth Exchange Officer may become involved him/herself and/or he/she may seek support from members of the Youth Exchange team, who speak the language and/or are familiar with the home country culture and customs.

An exchange student can become a victim of any matter of bullying or harassment almost anywhere: in the host home, at school, at an activity, online or anywhere in the community. Similarly, exchange students are not necessarily all perfect angels. Any antisocial behavior on the part of the exchange student needs to be addressed immediately. Exchange students are encouraged to choose their friends wisely and avoid situations that would reflect poorly on themselves and Rotary Youth Exchange. Exchange students are classified as “citizen ambassadors” by the State Department. If Rotary exchange students are not behaving in a manner that reflects positively on themselves, their home country and/or Rotary Youth Exchange, they will be sent home within short order.

For **very serious matters**, such as assault, sexual assault, traumatic injury, and a whole range other serious matters that can occur, **medical care and/or law enforcement are the first call**. Such incidents are an “all hands on deck” matter and the Youth Exchange Officer, the SCANEX chair, the head of NAYEN and our counterparts in the home country will need to be informed as soon as possible, so that

we can do our part to ensure the exchange student's safety and well-being and communicate with the child's natural parents. (Knock on wood, nothing serious has happened in our district, but we need to remain vigilant nonetheless). We have a rapid response team composed of a psychologist, a representative from law enforcement and a trained District officer, and a trained State Department representative who are available with a phone call should a need arise.

Host Home Requirements

Bedroom and Living Arrangements:

- Students must have a private bed (not shared) with a full-sized mattress and bedding. If a student is placed on a couch or in a shared area, the counselor can address these standards with the host family.

Access to Facilities:

- Students need access to study spaces, laundry, and snacks. If a student feels restricted, the counselor can work with the family to ensure they have reasonable access.

Chores:

- Chores should mirror what other family members do, like helping with dishes or tidying up. Students should not be asked to handle extensive household responsibilities, such as regular babysitting or elder care.

Visitor Policy:

- Any overnight adult visitors must have a background check, providing extra security and peace of mind.

Bedroom: The exchange student is required to have his own bed in a room with a door that closes. The bed should have a bed frame with a mattress and not, for example, be a futon or a sofa. The mattress should be one with springs and/or foam—no air mattresses or waterbeds. The room may be a shared room with one minor host sibling of the same sex. The room may not be shared with an adult, for example, a grandparent. The student's room situation needs to be maintained during the entirety of the exchange student's stay. The host parents, for example, cannot require the exchange student to sleep on the living room couch when guests come to visit.

Covid-19: Consult with the Youth Exchange Officer, if arrangements need to be made for Covid-19 quarantining.

Homework: The exchange student will need a desk and chair to himself. It is allowed that the desk and chair are not in the room where he sleeps; He just needs a place appropriate to complete his homework.

Bathroom: The exchange student will need access to a functioning bathroom with toilet, sink, shower or tub. The bathroom may be shared with other members of the family.

Laundry: The student should be allowed access to laundry facilities and be allowed to use as agreed to

by the host parents. Depending on the host family's customs and habits, some exchange students do their own laundry. The host student can expect to have clean laundry, whether he washes his clothes himself or his laundry is done by the host parents. The counselor should inquire whether the exchange student has worked out laundry arrangements with the host parents or if there are any issues there.

Kitchen: The exchange student should expect to have at least minimum access to the host family kitchen, for example, use of the refrigerator to store medicine or the occasional other food item. The host student should be allowed, at a minimum, to freely access some amounts of food from the kitchen such as bread, butter, yoghurt, fruit, cheese and so on on his/her own without necessarily asking. He should be able to freely enjoy a piece of toast or glass of milk anytime, for example. The host family and exchange student should have a discussion on use of the kitchen, for example, cooking and cleaning up early on in the exchange.

The exchange student can be asked to help in meal preparation and with clean-up as would other children in the family (set the table, chop vegetables, etc.). Having the exchange student cook a favorite meal for the host family is one of the best ways to share a culture and is encouraged by Rotary Youth Exchange as a family activity. This is a once-in-awhile thing, however. It cannot be expected that the exchange student cook regularly for the host family. (Of course, if the exchange student is an avid cook and this is a hobby he/she enjoys and his/her cooking hobby is supported by the host family, that's fine).

Adults staying in the home: Each person living in the house (or, more specifically, spending the night), who is over 18 years old, will need to undergo a **criminal background check**. A background check takes about three days to complete. Should the host parents have out-of-town guests spending the night, they will need to undergo a background check before they are allowed to spend the night in the same house as the exchange student.

Staying overnight in the company of adults, who are not the host family: Should an exchange student be invited to join, say, the family of a school friend on an overnight trip, anyone over 18 years old going on the trip will need to undergo a criminal background check. This includes the parents, grandparents and/or any siblings of the school friend over 18 years old. Should the exchange student go on a school-sponsored overnight trip, the public school chaperones will have undergone a recent criminal background check with the school and are therefore not required to undergo the Rotary Youth Exchange criminal background check. Should the exchange student go on an overnight trip **not** sponsored by a public school, for example, a trip organized by a private sports team, private orchestra, scouting or church group, any adults on this trip will need to undergo a criminal background check. **Again, no exchange student may leave the geographic area of the Rotary District without prior permission from the Youth Exchange Officer.** A criminal background check is required for all overnight stays regardless of whether the overnight stay is within or without the District boundaries.

Costs and Stipend

Students receive a monthly stipend (approximately \$100) from the hosting Rotary Club, intended for personal expenses like snacks, school supplies, or social outings. However, students are responsible for larger personal costs, including school activity fees, cell phone plans and/or specialized gear. The hosting Rotary Club will provide the student with a small monthly stipend of approximately \$100 to cover incidentals. **The counselor should make sure the student is receiving this stipend.** If the stipend is

given in check form, personally handing the check to the student is a good opportunity to check in with the exchange student.

Examples:

- **School Supplies and Personal Gear:** If a student wishes to join a sports team requiring specific equipment, they should be prepared to cover this cost themselves or make arrangements with their family back home.

The counselor can guide students on managing expenses within their budget or advise them to discuss these larger purchases with their natural family.

The students are required to keep an emergency fund of approximately \$500 untouched, unless needed specifically for emergencies. **This \$500 should be kept by the counselor and returned to the student at the end of the exchange year.**

The students each carry **very comprehensive health insurance.**

That said, an exchange student can mean additional everyday costs to the host family--a bit more food, water, electricity and so on. It is also expected that the host family cover normal small extra expenses that they would cover for their own child, for example, meals at a restaurant when the host family goes out to dinner. If the student goes for a meal with friends *outside* of the host family, that expense would be the exchange student's own.

The student is expected to cover his own school supplies, clothing, toiletries, bus fare, ride shares and cell phone plans. Big expenses, such as certain activity fees at school (team fees for uniforms, equipment and travel, musical instrument fees, etc.) are also to be covered by the student himself.

Certain expensive things, for example, Disneyland tickets should the family make a trip, should be discussed with the exchange student beforehand. Some host families are in a position to pay for the exchange student's Disneyland tickets, while others may not be. It all comes down to good communication. If an exchange student is invited to go along to Disneyland with friends, that cost should be borne by the exchange student himself.

Should the exchange student have habits that create a significant cost burden on the host family--say, taking hour-long showers or raiding the refrigerator empty--which cannot be rectified with communication between the parties, it is part of the counselor's job to grab the reins.

When Exchanges Don't Work Out

Though rare, exchanges may end early due to serious rule violations or unresolved issues. Rotary's program is built on proactive support, successfully facilitating almost 100 years of exchanges with minimal early returns.

Examples include:

- **Substance Use or Major Rule Violations:** If a student engages in drug or alcohol use, they will be sent home immediately, as Rotary enforces strict policies on illegal activities.

- **Repeated Misalignments:** If a student continuously disregards family rules or Rotary standards despite guidance, an early return might be necessary for everyone's well-being.

Sometimes an exchange is not successful. It is very rare, but there have been instances when exchanges are ended early and exchange students are sent home before the scholastic year is complete. **Each student has an open-ended return airline ticket.** They can each be put on the very next plane home.

Drug or alcohol use means an immediate flight home. Should a student be caught doing something illegal, he will lose his visa. If law enforcement is involved, the student's exchange is over and he/she will be sent home (barring the need to remain in the U.S. for legal proceedings).

The decision to send an exchange student home falls to the Youth Exchange Officer in consultation with his/her peers in SCANEX. If the fundamental rules of exchange are broken, the exchange student has forfeited his ability to remain in the country. The host family is not at liberty to "forgive and forget" and allow the student to remain on exchange. Similarly, the host family is not the one to decide whether an exchange is to be ended. That decision is made by the YEO in consultation with the SCANEX team. If a host parent is threatening to "send a student home," that must be addressed.

More often than any big breaking of the rules, an unsuccessful exchange tends to be "death by a thousand cuts"--the culmination of little things that add up to resentment and discourse. An exchange is most often not successful when a student does not put in the **work** to succeed. And it is work! A student needs to put in the time to really learn and speak the language. Students need to put in the time and effort to overcome any anxieties they may have and proactively communicate with their host family and make friends at school. Because this program is approved by the State Department, the reasons for ending an exchange early are shared with the State Department. That information can very much affect whether a person is granted a visa to visit the United States in the future. It is very much in the interest of the students to stick to the rules and put in the work to make the exchange successful.

A student's behavior--negative or positive--reflects on the entire program and can impact its future. The Rotary SCANEX team is on standby to handle almost any issue. And in almost 100 years, Rotary Youth Exchange has seen a thing or two. But it is still going strong!

The 6 D's: These are the Big "Don't's"

No Drinking (alcohol): It is illegal for anyone under 21 to drink alcohol in the United States. Exchange students have committed to obey all laws. Drinking could very well result in an immediate flight home. For our outbound students, although students may be of legal drinking age in that host country, the No Drinking rule still applies to those students.

No Drugs (illicit narcotics): It is illegal for anyone to consume illicit drugs. It is illegal in California for anyone under 21 to consume cannabis products. Exchange students have committed to obey all laws. Consuming illicit drugs will result in immediate release from the program, removal of his/her visa and, if law enforcement is not involved, immediate repatriation to the home country.

No Driving: Exchange students are prohibited from operating **any** motorized vehicle. Their accident and liability insurance will not cover injuries, deaths and property damage if accidents when they are behind the wheel of a motorized vehicle. Those costs will have to be borne by the exchange student and his natural parents. Motorized vehicles include cars, but also jet skis, golf carts, power boats, ride-on lawn mowers and dirt bikes and motorcycles. E-bikes and e-scooters are allowed at the moment, however, our

insurer may adjust their policy at any time.

No Dating: Committed, exclusive romantic relationships are highly discouraged for many reasons. Significantly, we do not want exchange students engaging in sexual contact because of the inherent risks. Furthermore, a committed, exclusive relationship tends to place the exchange student in a small, inwardly-focused “bubble of love.” Exchange students will tend to sacrifice experiences and connections which would expand his/her world to remain within this small bubble. This works contrary to the mission of Rotary Youth Exchange. Cupid *is* stupid and young love *does* happen. Nonetheless, exchange students should not be actively pursuing romantic entanglements (“I’m going to get a girlfriend to drive me everywhere.” “I’m going to find a boyfriend to pay for everything.” “He’s so popular, I’m going to be his girlfriend so I can make lots of friends.” etc.). Exchange students should be encouraged to attend things like Homecoming and Prom, but we would prefer for these dates to be platonic in nature. If the host family and counselor recognize a committed romantic relationship developing, the family and counselor should take careful note of how the relationship is impacting the student’s exchange. If the student is withdrawing from activities with other friends, is spending lavishly on the girlfriend/boyfriend and is withdrawing from family life, counseling by the YEO may be necessary.

No Decoration (body modifications, piercings and tattoos): Tattoos and piercings are not allowed under 18 years’ of age without parental consent. Host parents, although they are conveyed many rights, may not consent to body modifications of their exchange students. Exchange students are expected to return to their home country with the exact same number of piercings and tattoos as they left home with. Hair color and hair cuts is a gray area: Exchange students, like all teenagers, are exploring their identity and will experiment with their outward appearance. Host parents and counselors should refrain from voicing their personal (negative) opinions on hair choices (“But you looked so much prettier with long hair!” “Boys don’t dye their hair bright colors!”). After all, it’s just hair. That being said, a drastic change in appearance coupled with social withdrawal, poor temperament, sleeping a lot or other “off” behaviors could signal something that requires attention.

No Disrespect: Rotary Youth Exchange has a zero tolerance policy for comments, slang terms, social media posts, behaviors, jokes, hand gestures, and/or symbols/words on clothing that are racist, discriminatory, ableist, homophobic, sexist, misogynistic and/or otherwise offensive. Exchange students may need some gentle education here, as often they may not be aware of a common, but nonetheless offensive term they hear at school or symbol they may see on social media. Furthermore, exchange students should be made aware of any micro-aggressions they may be engaging in and are perhaps not aware of (e.g. calling a woman or girl “a female,” wearing something with a Confederate flag, using the term “ret*rded,” singing lyrics to a popular song containing offensive terms and so on).

The 6 Be’s

A successful exchange year is simple. It isn’t *easy*, mind you, but it is *simple*. Rotary Youth Exchange has six simple answers to solve any common social and cultural difficulties in youth exchange:

1. BE FIRST

I am a person of action!

2. BE CURIOUS

I seek to understand!

3. BE ON PURPOSE

I am certain of my outcome and move steadily toward it!

4. BE GRATEFUL

I focus on things I can be thankful for!

5. BE OF SERVICE

I give of myself!

6. BE HERE NOW

I live in the moment!

The 6 Be's are as much rules as the 6 D's. Where the 6 D's are *prohibitions*, the 6 Be's need to be *proactively* executed and are, therefore, more difficult. The exchange students have been trained in the 6 Be's: As a counselor, you can use the 6 Be's to help the exchange student resolve most of the common stumbling stones in youth exchange.

Are the host parents complaining that the exchange student is a slob? Then he's not "being of service". Is the exchange student having trouble making friends? Then it's very likely he's not "being first"--first to approach someone on the schoolyard, first to join a club, first to volunteer to speak in front of the class. Is the exchange student homesick? Then it's very likely he's not "being grateful" for the effort his host parents are making and he's not "being here, now" engaging with his host parents, classmates, neighbors and Rotarians.

Thank you for stepping up to fill this important Youth Exchange role. I believe you will enjoy engaging with these young people. Rotary Youth Exchange students are some of the most delightful and engaging young people and you have a chance to make an impact on this next amazing generation.

If you have any questions or require support or assistance with your assigned exchange student, please reach out anytime.

Contact information

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