

**Informational Host Family Meeting
Eisenhower & Zarrow International School
3/26/2019**

Exchange Students

2019-2020 Exchange Program Goal: The exchange student will be fully immersed in an American lifestyle, participating daily in school, home activities, and improving their English language abilities.

Schedule

- Spain: First week of September to First week of November
- Costa Rica: November to December

Potential Issues

- Homesickness, eating habits, school work

Communication

- Parents in home country-WhatsApp
- Chaperone-WhatsApp group
- Coordinator
- Facebook-will create a group with all Host Families as a means of communication throughout the duration of their stay

Events

- Host family meeting before their arrival
- Welcome Potlucks during first/second week of school
- Field trips scheduled by Coordinator at the beginning of the year
- Play dates-coordinated between families

Expectations of Students

- Adapt to host family
- Learn language and culture
- Attend school with good grades
- Participate in school and family activities
- Communicate concerns or problems with chaperone and host family

Expectations of Host Families

- Provide a safe and nurturing home
- Treat student like your own child; you are their parents while they're here
 - Do NOT coddle them, they may expect it to continue
 - Giving exchange student *special* privileges can lead to sibling rivalry
 - Be very specific about your expectations, rules, etc. The students will do better when everything is very clear from the beginning.

- Help with any challenges the student is facing or address concerns with Exchange Coordinator/Chaperone
 - Academics
 - Language
 - Culture shock
 - Homesickness
- Cost
 - Pay for or provide all meals while visiting
 - Cover expenses associated with family outings (students will have their own spending money for souvenirs, but you are expected to cover all entrance fees, dinners, etc.)
 - You should NOT have to buy them clothing. If they came unprepared, immediately contact the Coordinator to find a solution.
 - You may buy gifts for them at your discretion.
- Host families should be prepared to:
 - Help with personal care (help dry hair, reminders to bathe, help with laundry, encourage to eat and drink sufficiently to maintain health, take care of student if they become ill)
 - Communicate frequently with chaperones, the exchange coordinator, teachers, and parents to understand expectations and help their student during the exchange
- First few weeks - what to expect
 - Excitement, everything is new to the student
 - Culture shock (food, schedule, weather, environment, school)
 - Homesickness
 - Language struggles
 - Exhaustion – some students are adapting to a different time zone and schedule
- Last few weeks - what to expect
 - Language and culture will begin to click
 - More involved with American friends at school
 - If switching host families, learning new rules and family style
 - If same host family, noticeable adjustment to rules and family style
 - Preparing for separation and returning home
 - Leaving will be harder than arrival, especially if it was a very successful exchange
 - The more successful the exchange, the harder the re-entry to their home routine

What NOT to Expect

- Your exchange student will not instantly feel like a member of your family. They will start as a guest, and after some time they will start to feel like a family member.
- While a successful exchange can be extremely rewarding for the family and the student, it will not be perfect. There will be challenges and difficulties, but every family has the support of the Chaperone, Coordinator, Administration, and former host families.

Sibling relationships and/or rivalries

- Children in the home may be jealous/envious of exchange student (especially if expectations are different in terms of electronics usage, chores, food preferences, activities, etc.). Parents sometimes need to give extra time or attention to visiting students.
- Children may “get on each other’s nerves” – especially if they have similar or polar-opposite styles.
- Sometimes an exchange student needs a little “alone” time to quietly read or rest. Monitor the amount of time. We encourage interaction at dinner or with family in most activities.
- Share a lesson on privacy or modesty for host siblings and exchange students – respect any wishes for closed doors for changing clothes, for example.
- Children may be jealous of one-another during playdates, especially if visiting friends pay more attention to the child(ren) other than the one designated for the playdate.

Culture Shock

- Fast food is not typical in Spain/Costa Rica. Most meals are cooked in the home or at school.
- Landscape in Oklahoma is different
- Pace in US is different than in Spain/Costa Rica
- Houses are laid out differently and are often much smaller in Spain and Costa Rica
- Plumbing and electrical outlets are different in US than Europe
- The school day in Spain/Costa Rica is longer than in the US and they have more recess
- Less structure in the classroom and more independence
- Things that we are accustomed to seeing everyday are different (signage, food, cars are larger in the US)

Habits

- Eat dinner much later (Spain)
- Way of speaking is more direct in Spain/Costa Rica – sometimes seems rude or demanding – but is not intended to be disrespectful
- Families kiss cheeks frequently in greeting and departing
- Spanish/Costa Rican food is not typically as “spicy” as American food. Some common dishes may be more flavorful than students typically eat.
- Might want coffee (Costa Rica)
- Used to bigger breakfasts and sometimes it is hard for them to make it to lunch time

Advice from past host families

- *Communicate with your child(ren) before they arrive that the student is no better/no different than them and do not give preferential treatment. Enjoy the experience to the fullest. It is an amazing experience for everyone involved. Show them around, take them places, but also rest. It's ok to have a weekend where there are no plans!*
- *It is an adjustment having someone else's child for several weeks. Do your best to explain family rules and habits up front (such as, we don't allow electronics in the bedroom or we don't eat out much)*
- *Set ground rules early; do not treat the student like a guest. Also, we signed our student up for basketball, which our daughter did not play. This was a huge stress on top of everything else that we had going on--I would not recommend this unless your child is playing the same sport on the same team.*
- *Make sure they are treated as family not guests*
- *Be ready for anything. We had a completely different kid year to year -- one was very mature and one was less mature. They were both positive experiences, but we had to handle each kid very differently. Try to pick up cues from parents about whether kid wants more comfort/attention or more independence.*
- *Plan that student will want some downtime or time with other exchange students*
- *Be flexible. Be accessible. And just ENJOY this experience.*
- *The sibling dynamic...it really needs to be considered how well adding another child fits with your family.*
- *Make sure to communicate and connect with the host child's family as much as possible, before and during the exchange*
- *Rather than calling on Sunday nights before school the next day, we connected on Saturday so we could stay busy with events Saturday evening and Sunday in order to prevent homesickness.*
- *You and your child may or may not bond with the student as if he/she is one of your own and if you do not, it can still be a positive experience.*
- *It is hard work; I felt like I was constantly "on" - making sure our student's needs were met, making sure I was communicating expectations clearly, making sure we balanced fun with work. Making sure our student had a well-rounded and educational experience. We had a strong desire to go do many things around Tulsa nearby, but we had to make sure we balanced that with rest and simple playtime. It became evident that our student needed brain breaks from our family (she wasn't used to a younger sibling, and ours loved being with her!) She withdrew sometimes to get that rest - but it was hard to know if it was what she needed or because she wasn't getting what she needed. Our student was a bit disorganized; it was work to make sure she had everything she needed. All of that said, listening to her teach our daughter correct Spanish and our daughter teach her English was delightful. Watching the two of them create and play, learn and laugh, and even argue and work it out was good. Having a student made all of us grow in ways I never imagined. I would absolutely do it again.*
- *I think it is very helpful if two families that live close to each other host friends from CR or Spain. It is more, fun and helpful to get together with them and to "share" responsibilities (one family can take the kids to an outing and let one host family have a break, etc...) The exchange kids enjoy it as well.*
- *I would recommend maybe "buddying up" with another host parent and maybe taking turn in showing the kids around town. I seemed to be worn out feeling I needed to keep them entertained and showing them what the city or surroundings had to offer. One family one weekend then the next family the next.*