

## DECEMBER SUPPORT TIPS

December is full of fun activities, both foreign and familiar, and with them come high emotions. The holidays can be a stressful time for all, perhaps more so for our international students. You are YFU's eyes and ears on the ground. Our Local Coordinators across the country are often the only YFU representatives to have direct contact with the students and host families. This is a great honor and a great responsibility. We thank you for accepting this responsibility and helping YFU support thousands of healthy and successful exchanges each year. Happy holidays!

### SUPPORT TIPS

#### BE THEIR ADVOCATE!

You now have likely formed bonds and relationships with both your host families and your students. This is great! If an issue arises, it is the LC's job to support both parties impartially. Keep in mind that YFU students have left their normal support systems at home. As you support your students,

- Never threaten to send a student home.
- Remember, our students are teenagers and may not have the skills and tools they need to adjust to a new situation.
- Listen to their concerns and help them develop problem solving skills.
- Let your Community Manager know if you feel you may be developing a bias towards either the student or host family.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> IN-PERSON CONTACTS

Many LCs find the holiday season as the best time to meet their host family and student in person for a second time. Your second in-person contact with your student and host family must take place before January 31<sup>st</sup>. YFU suggests planning this visit early.

#### HOLIDAY BLUES

Holidays are a prime time for homesickness. Often as exchange students get swept up in their host family's travels, traditions, extended family gatherings, etc., students miss their traditions from home. LCs can help students prepare by encouraging students to share the holiday traditions of their natural family and country. LCs should encourage their host families to incorporate some of the student's traditions into their celebrations this year. Sharing traditions allows students to share their culture and at the same time show gratitude to their host family.

#### TALK TO THEM IN PRIVATE

Make sure to instruct your students to go someplace private in the house for your monthly conversations. Just as you need to talk to the parents without a child listening, the students need to talk to an advocate without their host family listening. LCs might want to call students during a free period at school, offer to meet after school, or invite students out for a coffee or ice cream. LCs should remind their students that if they have something else they are not comfortable saying right now, students can email the LC.

Even if you see your student and/or host family casually on a regular basis, LCs must establish a specific meeting to discuss how each party is adjusting to the exchange experience.

#### MID YEAR ORIENTATIONS

Mid-year orientations happen soon after the new year. This is a good opportunity for LCs to meet with their students and host families face-to-face (which is required before January 31<sup>st</sup>), in a fun and social environment. Community Managers will provide materials and information to LCs re: Mid-year orientations.

#### GIFT GIVING

Gift giving can make students and families feel nervous if expectations aren't clearly understood. Encourage your host families and students to have a conversation about how holidays are celebrated in their home. Gifts do not need to be expensive. Consider using the internet to find do-it-yourself craft sites to get some fun ideas for inexpensive gifts.

Natural parents and families may want to send gifts to the host family home for the student to open on Christmas. This is acceptable; as long as the gifts do not interfere with the host family's rules or expectations.

#### NEW YEAR'S EVE EXPECTATIONS

Everyone's expectations of New Year's Eve are different. While some cultures and people celebrate grandly, others hardly mark the passing of a year. Many teenagers have high expectations for New Year's celebrations. LCs can help by explaining to students that not every town has fireworks and not every American family

celebrates with a big party. Help your students set appropriate expectations. LCs can also help by reminding students to respect their host family's curfew and refrain from underage drinking.

### DECEMBER HOLIDAYS AROUND THE WORLD

Some students might not celebrate holidays the HF/LC are aware of. Below is a list of holidays celebrated around the world!

- Dec 1: Restoration of Independence (Portugal)
- Dec 5: The King's Birthday (Thailand)
- Dec 6: Independence Day (Finland)
- Dec 6: Saint Nicholas Day (European countries)
- Dec 8: Day of Immaculate Conception (Roman Catholics)
- Dec 8: Constitution Day (Uzbekistan)
- Dec 10: Constitution Day (Thailand)
- Dec 12: Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Mexico)
- Dec 16: Victory Day Bijoy Dibosh (Bangladesh)
- Dec 16: Day of Reconciliation (South Africa)
- Dec 18 to Dec 26 (2022): Hanukkah (Jewish holiday)
- Dec 23: The Emperor's Birthday (Japan)
- Dec 24 & 25: Christmas (Christian holiday)
- Dec 26: Boxing Day (Various countries)
- Dec 26 to Jan 1: Kwanzaa (African Americans)
- Dec 30: Rizal Day (The Philippines)
- Dec 31: New Year's Eve (many countries)

### YFU OFFICE CLOSURE DAYS / EMERGENCY LINES

YFU USA offices are typically closed on Christmas Day and New Year's Day, and typically close early on Christmas Eve. However, this does not mean YFU is not available for LCs, students, and families during the holidays. YFU USA has two emergency lines; one for travel and one for support. **Please only use these numbers for true emergencies** as YFU staff like to enjoy downtime with their families too!

Support Emergency Line: **1-800-424-3691**

Travel Emergency Line: **1-800-705-9510**

## ADMINISTRATIVE

### CONTACT REPORTS ARE IMPORTANT

Personal contact with our students & families provides an environment of support. Monthly contact is also required by the Department of State. Contact reports are due by the last day of the month; YFU appreciates LCs submitting their reports on time. If you are having an IT issue submitting your report, let your Community Manager know!

### LC TRAVEL PLANS

If you will be traveling for an extended period, please let your students, host families, and Community Manager know. Please make sure your host families and students have their Community Manager and Support Services Manager's contact information.

### PERMISSION TO TRAVEL

The holiday season means many host families will be traveling. A Permission to Travel form is required for: international trips, a trip the student contributes \$300 or more to, a trip that causes the student to miss 5 or more days of school, a trip with a family other than the host family, and /or a trip sponsored by a religious or community organization. LCs should make sure their host families have a copy of the Permission to Travel Policy.

### WINTER CLOTHING

It is not the host family's responsibility to purchase appropriate winter clothes for their student. However, if your student does not have the right jacket, boots, etc. please let your Community Manager know. This message can be relayed to their natural parents; who can provide money for winter clothes!

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

### How was Thanksgiving? Did you help with the cooking? How did your host family celebrate the holiday?

Asking students about their host family's Thanksgiving celebration is a good way to check on student and host family relationship. Discuss any issues the student brings up, and coach students on handling difficult situations.

### What holiday traditions does your host family celebrate in the month of December? Are you exchanging gifts and if so, what ideas do you have for your family?

By asking your students what holidays their host family will be celebrating, LCs have the chance to check on the student's knowledge and comfort with the holiday season away from home. In terms of gifts, be sure to stress that money should not be the focus. Encourage and brainstorm ways to make or purchase inexpensive gifts. Students could make a scrapbook or picture story about their exchange with their host family, write a poem or thank you note, create a "play" with other host family members, etc.

### During this time of the year, is your natural family celebrating any holidays? If so, what do you usually do for the holidays? Have you shared any of this with your host family?

For most students, this is the first time they have been away from their families for the holidays. It is important to acknowledge the customs they will be missing. A good way to help with homesickness is to remember their natural family's traditions and share them with the host family. It may help to remind students that they are always going to have their home traditions to go

back to, but this might be the only time they get to experience the holidays in the US. If students have a hard time thinking of their natural family's / country's traditions; LCs can suggest the categories of music, food, movies, activities, religious ceremonies, clothing, etc.

**Now that you are halfway through your exchange, it is a good time to reflect on what you have learned and focus on what you want to get out of the rest of this year. Example questions for students: What have you learned about yourself? How is your English? How have you showed your host family and your American school that you are thankful for them hosting you? What have you done well? What could you do better?**

It is helpful to honor "benchmarks" in the exchange year. By the new year, many students will be about halfway done with their exchange year. This is a good time to recognize the hard work they have already put in and make goals for the remainder of their year.

## **FOR FAMILIES**

---

**Have you discussed holiday plans with your exchange student? What are the expectations for exchanging gifts?**

LCs should encourage host families to have open discussions with their students about family traditions surrounding the holidays, including gift giving so that expectations are clear. Host families are not expected to give their student expensive gifts, but they are expected to treat the student like a member of the family and help the student participate in the family's traditions. Many families choose to purchase their student a few small gifts and many students will have gifts from home / their natural families to open as well.

LCs should remind host families that if they are traveling with their student over the holidays, they may need to submit a Permission to Travel request. LCs should have the Permission to Travel Policy on hand to discuss with families. If a host family is planning an international trip with their student, LCs should ensure that the travel documentation is submitted a few weeks in advance, and remind host families that they should not leave the US until they have an authorized signature on their student's DS-2019. YFU students who leave the country cannot re-enter without this authorized signature; LCs should consult their Support Services Manager (SSM) if they have questions.

**What holidays does your student celebrate at home? Can you incorporate them into this month's festivities?**

All holidays throughout the year are a perfect time to learn about your student's customs and rituals. LCs should encourage host families to include their student's traditions in the holiday celebrations. This helps the student feel less homesick and is a true cultural exchange for both parties! Possible contributions could include an addition to the meal, a dessert, a blessing at the table, a song or movie, a craft, a dance, etc. If the student does not normally participate in a holiday during December, that is ok - the host family can share their traditions and start the conversation with the student re: other traditions their family participates in throughout the year.

**How has your student been handling the holiday season? Are they excited? Or do they seem a little more down?**

At this time of year, some students who have been doing well may hit the "holiday blues." LCs should give the host family a head's up that this may happen and encourage host families to be flexible and supportive if their student is feeling extra homesick. If a host family is struggling with this, it is helpful to reassure them that extra homesickness is normal this time of year and it will pass.

Host families should be informing their student of the family's holiday plans and talk with their students about when natural families might want to skype or have a zoom call with the student. It is helpful to plan calls with the natural family around travel and holiday trips / visits to other homes.

**What are your family's New Year's Eve plans? Have you considered goals for the New Year in your role as a host parent?**

Many families celebrate the New Year quietly, by watching festivities on their television, or with other family traditions. Additionally, family rules may be a little different for New Year's Eve. While some families extend the standard curfew, others don't want their children to be out on the road at all. Encourage families to talk with their student about their New Year's traditions and the host family's expectations.

**Have there been any significant changes in your household that YFU should know about?**

If family members have moved into or out of the home, if parents have changed employer or employment status, if telephone numbers or email addresses have changed, YFU needs to know and follow up accordingly.