

OCTOBER SUPPORT TIPS

Fall continues and students have been here for at least one month and are adjusting in their own ways to American life. Host families are creating new routines and dynamics to accommodate a new family member. By now, you should have met with your students and host families in person at least once, and hopefully they are learning to trust you as their YFU LC.

We hope these tips will provide you with the materials necessary to have comfortable and meaningful conversations during your monthly meetings. As always, thank you for the work you do. YFU could not exist without Local Coordinators!

SUPPORT TIPS

HOMESICKNESS MONTH

The excitement has worn down and routines have begun. Homesickness and culture shock are common in these initial months. Symptoms to watch for include:

- Isolation—not socializing, staying in their room
- Excessive sleep
- Lack of or too much appetite
- Excessive crying
- Excessive contact with friends & family back home
- Psychosomatic symptoms – headache, stomachache

A little homesickness is normal. However, if the student's homesickness is affecting their ability to integrate into the school and host family, alert your Community Manager.

WELCOME / ARRIVAL PLACEMENTS

Repping a student and host family in a welcome or arrival placement presents a unique set of considerations. See our Arrival Support Tips for more information. Once the student is moved into the permanent host family, another SEE visit is required within 60 days of the move.

LATE ARRIVAL STUDENTS

If you are repping a late arrival student, keep in mind their delay in the adjustment curve. Please also remember to perform an in-person visit within two weeks of their arrival.

LANGUAGE STRUGGLES DISGUISED AS ADAPTATION STRUGGLES

A fair number of students struggle with using English for all of their daily tasks. Sometimes it is not as obvious as the student not understanding certain words or phrases, but it surfaces as an adaptation issue.

Using a different language 24/7 can make teenagers overly tired and schoolwork is likely to take longer because it is in a non-native language – this may lead to the student withdrawing from family activities, excessive sleepiness, and/or a high level of frustration.

When one of your host families tells you they are not happy with their student's adaptation process, make sure to explore the language dynamic in the problem. LCs can help by ensuring the student is in the right classes for their language ability, sharing tips for language learning with students and families (tips below), and reminding everyone to be patient; language acquisition takes time!

POST-ARRIVAL ORIENTATIONS

October is the month for Post-Arrival Orientations. LCs should remind their students that they are required to attend. If a student's family cannot go, please help the student network with others to find a ride through a carpool. Sometimes it may be necessary to conduct a one-on-one orientation with your student.

REQUESTS TO MOVE

As this is the month for homesickness, it is also common to hear students say they want to move to another host family before seeking resolutions within their placement. Many are in contact with other YFU students, compare their different

experiences and feel that they would be happier in another home. Some students are tempted to request help from fellow YFU friends to find a new host family.

Remind your student that a move is the last resort and cannot happen without YFU's involvement, mediation, and evaluation. Please encourage your student to remain motivated and positive to have a successful year with your support and help.

Some students *will* end up changing host families during this time of year, but YFU will always try to mediate the situation between the student and host family before changing the placement.

REPORT CONCERNS RIGHT AWAY

If an abusive or unsafe situation occurs with a student or host family, inform your Support Services Manager right away. If it is outside of regular business hours, please utilize YFU's emergency number: **1-800-424-3691**.

STUDENT TRAVEL REQUESTS

LCs should remind students and host families to read through the Permission to Travel Policy. Travel requests must be submitted online through the host family account. Different types of trips require different documentation and approvals (see policy). Please note that international trips require extra steps and host families should submit their request at least 6 weeks prior to the international trip.

CELL PHONES & SOCIAL NETWORKING

Students' contact with their natural families & friends should be decreasing. It may be helpful to come up with a once-weekly scheduled time for the student to speak with their natural family. Students should pay for their own cell phone and cell phone plan; YFU discourages host families from purchasing the student a phone and/or adding students to the family plan. For more tips and information re: cell phones and social media, please check the Appendix to the Passport to the USA for these documents: "Social Networking Safety Tips" and "Cell Phone Guidelines." LCs should encourage students to change their social media language to English.

STUDENT INSURANCE INFO

LCs should confirm with the student and host family that they received student insurance info via snail mail. Students arrive with their insurance card and YFU mails an insurance packet to the host family's home address. Students and host families should put the insurance's number into their cell phones and ensure they each have a copy of the student's insurance card. Insurance policies differ according to the country the student is from; please check the YFU website here: <https://www.yfuusa.org/international/insurance> for policy information and documentation.

TIPS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

YFU recommends the following tips to help with English acquisition:

- Reach children's books out loud
- Watch American tv with English subtitles turned on
- Text in English
- Use social media in English
- Learn American songs

ADMINISTRATIVE

GATHER STUDENT CELL PHONE

Please collect your student's cell phone number and add it into my.yfu.org. LCs should also make sure their student's voicemail is set up.

CONFIRM STUDENT EMAIL ADDRESS

Please ensure YFU has the correct email address for your student(s) and ensure the correct email address is in my.yfu.org.

IN PERSON VISIT & SEE VISIT

LCs must conduct an in person visit within 2 weeks of a student's arrival. A SEE visit must also be conducted within 60 days of the student's arrival (30 days for students in arrival placements). SEE Visits often fall in the month of October – please ensure your student's SEE visit and in-person visit has taken place!

- Write in a journal
- Limit contact with people in the home country
- Read the newspaper
- Get involved in an activity with other teenagers
- Put post-it notes on things around the house with English words on them
- Repeat what people say in English back to them

QUESTIONS TO ASK

FOR STUDENTS

Did you go to your Post-Arrival Orientation (or when do you plan to go)? What was the best part? Did you set goals with your host family? What are they?

Talk with your students about the different sessions presented at the orientation. If you weren't at the orientation, ask the orientation coordinator what was covered or review the Post-Arrival Orientation Materials provided by your Community Manager (CM). If your student did not attend an orientation, YFU asks that the LC conduct a one-on-one orientation with the student; using materials provided by the Community Manager. Keep in mind that the Post-Arrival Orientation is mandated by the Department of State; all YFU students must receive this orientation.

What do you do on a typical evening or weekend with your host family? What are you doing to become part of your host family? What activities would you like to do with your host family?

Rather than asking your student(s) how things are going with their host families (they are likely to say "good"), LCs should ask open-ended questions such as the ones above. Don't forget to provide an opportunity for students to express positive and negative sentiments – it is natural that they have both. Becoming part of a host family takes time, effort, and patience.

YFU finds that after the Post-Arrival Orientation, some students have a "the grass is greener" mentality and can feel as if their host family may not be "up to par" with other student's host families. Help your students understand each family is different and it is up to the student to adapt to their host family. Students can invite host families to do what students are interested in, rather than waiting for the host families to initiate activities.

Have you been feeling "down"? What makes it worse? What makes you feel better?

Homesickness is normal, and common, in the month of October. Culture shock can accompany homesickness. It is ok to acknowledge that these feelings are normal; while also making sure the students are taking steps to move forward. Students should minimize frequent communications with folks from home. If this is a problem, suggest that students log or journal about their contact with home, notice how often they are in contact with people from home, and note how they feel afterwards. Students who spend time meeting new people and experiencing new things adjust more rapidly. Encourage students to take it day by day and list their coping skills for the LC and host family. Provide support for the student and reassure them that "this too shall pass!"

Is there anything about your host family or their home that you did not expect or that you want to talk about?

Now that some dust has settled, it is helpful to remind your students that you are their Local Coordinator and your role is to support them throughout their exchange. They should contact you if they ever feel uncomfortable, confused, or need to talk. Let students know the best way to contact you and the best times. YFU recommends that LCs take the student out of the home during some visits so that the student feels comfortable speaking freely.

FOR FAMILIES

How has your new son/daughter become part of your family's routines and activities?

Going into the second month, it is critical that exchange students are beginning to find their place in the family. A family is much like a mobile, with each family member being an integral part that allows the mobile to be in perfect balance. When a new piece is added (the student), other parts need to shift in order to find balance again. These changes can be harder for some family members than others. Everyone is making adjustments, including the students who are experiencing new foods, new climate, new language, new environment, new friends, etc.

Has your new son/daughter shown signs of homesickness or culture shock?

All students will have some homesickness and it can also have an impact on the host family. Some host families feel like their efforts to make the new son/daughter a part of the family have not been appreciated. Reassure your host family that these are very natural emotions for all exchange students and it doesn't reflect on the host family. Learning how to do things like preparing a meal or helping with chores helps to lessen culture shock and will help students feel more included in the host family. Host families should help students get involved with activities and organizations – socialization, English acquisition, and staying active all aid in decreasing feelings of homesickness. Host families should make sure the student knows they can talk to the host family, the LC, the school counselor, and / or the Community Manager. A student who talks about how they are feeling can usually work through homesickness and culture shock better than a student who isolates.

Have you received any feedback from your student's teachers or other school officials about his/her progress? How much time does your new son/daughter spend on homework?

LCs should get a sense of how active the host family is with their student's academic life. Does the host family feel overwhelmed by helping their new son/daughter with homework? Does the host family know if their student is struggling or successful with their English-speaking abilities at school? Or does it seem the host family is taking a more hands-off approach? No answer is correct; just informative. In the end, it is the responsibility of the student to keep up with their academic studies. If the student is struggling or failing some of their classes, inform the Community Manager. Students should be placed in the appropriate classes for their language ability. LCs and host families should make note of the student's grades throughout the year. YFU's expectation is for all students to maintain at least a "C" average in all classes.

Has anything in your family or home setting changed (such as someone moving in, job change, renovations)?

It is important for YFU to know if new people have moved into the home or if the environment has changed significantly. If there is any significant change, such as a new person in the house, LCs should alert the Community Manager.