

Parent Questions

about
Rotary Youth Exchange

If we send out child on this exchange, what about...

1. Will my child get credit for classes taken in the host country?

Probably not – it depends upon what your child’s school here is willing to accept.

2. Well, does this mean that my child will not graduate on time?

No, almost all students from the US are able to supplement their classes here with summer classes or correspondence classes and graduate with the class they were with before they left – and some are ahead enough academically that supplements are not necessary.

3. Well, what about college entrance exams – preparation for them and taking them? And what will this do to my child’s chances of getting into a really good university?

None of our former outbound exchange students have failed to be admitted to the university of their choice. Entrance exams are given almost everywhere and with great frequency – and the preparation can be done anywhere. And universities admissions offices look at the experience as a youth exchange student as a significant plus – it often is the factor that tips the scales over otherwise similarly qualified applicants.

4. Well, will my child get anything academically out of a year as a Rotary Youth Exchange Student?

Yes, they will definitely learn a new language (assuming they go to a non English speaking country) – and whether they may transfer academic credit or not, they will come home with a better knowledge of geography and world history than their classmates that stayed home. Moreover, students don’t usually fall behind in such areas as mathematics, science, and even English. In all probability they will study such subjects during their exchange. And by the way, when they return most students are able to obtain 12-15 semester hours of university credit in their new language just by taking an exam – that’s another \$2000-3000 families can save.

5. OK, I have to ask, why is Rotary operating a youth exchange program? Isn’t Rotary a service organization? There are a lot of youth exchange programs. Are you making money out of this?

There are a lot of youth exchange programs – and some of them are good, but the people that operate them are paid – and some of them are quite expensive. As to the question about Rotary and Rotarians making money on this program, the answer is a resounding No. No one involved in operating the Rotary Youth Exchange Program is paid. Indeed, the money always seems to flow the other direction. Most Rotarians involved in this program spend a good deal of their own money working in this program.

And yes, Rotary is a service organization – a world wide service organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for people in local club communities and around the world – and one of it’s main goals is to promote better understanding, friendship and peace among the people of the world. We think that youth exchange is an ideal mechanism for working toward this goal. But it is even more. First, it sends young ambassadors of goodwill from one country to another – helping the people of both countries to better understand the culture of the other. But it also provides an opportunity for young people to improve their own understanding of the world – and while doing it, to develop self-confidence and learn more about themselves in a way not possible at home.

6. OK, will my child come back home thinking that their home country, their parents, their family as a whole and their former friends are inferior to those made in their host country.

No! There will be a period of readjustment when they return just as there is a period of adjustment when they arrive in their host country – it’s called reverse culture shock – and some times it is more difficult than the culture shock that they experience when they are adjusting to the culture of their host country (reaction to the host culture).

Students return a year older and quite a bit wiser – they would have changed a bit even if they had stayed home, but it would not likely have been noticed by parents and friends. But when they return after a year away, parents and friends usually expect them to be exactly as they were when they left – but alas, they are not – and neither are the parents and friends that they left behind at home when they began their adventure. So everyone must readjust. Is it a problem? Sometimes it can be tense. But in time, things return to “normal” – actually, usually better than before they went away.

7. *This is a little scary. Are there some resources on how to deal with this “reverse culture shock”.*

Yes, indeed. Some of the answers (help) will be presented during your student’s preparation for the exchange – and there are printed resources by professionals that have studied these matters carefully. You might want to look up some presentations by Dr. Dennis White on www.yeoresources.org He is a psychologist (and a Rotarian) that has worked in Rotary Youth Exchange for many years, and he has studied the reaction of participants in great detail.

8. *What kind of family will my child live with? How do I know that they will not abuse them?*

The host Rotary Club carefully screens prospective host families and places students with families that will provide a safe and caring environment for students.

9. *I will be 5000 miles away! Who can my child go to if there is a problem with their host family? Or what if they get hurt? Or what if they need money? How can I be sure that someone is looking after their needs?*

Each student is assigned a Rotary Counselor – a carefully selected experienced Rotarian that knows the program and who puts the student’s welfare and interests first. While students usually have 2-4 host families, they have the same Rotary counselor throughout their exchange. The Rotary counselor is the student’s advocate and negotiates any dispute that might arise between the student and the host family – or the school.

10. *Well, what if my child and the Rotary counselor assigned to him/her don’t like each other?*

While this does not often happen, if it does, another Rotarian will be selected to serve as counselor – often someone else in the club that your child already knows and trusts.

11. *Who is in charge of my child?*

Students are hosted by a local Rotary Club. The club bears the responsibility for the student’s well being and for his/her supervision. The student’s Rotary counselor is the direct link between a student and his/her host club, but the student may contact the club president or any member of the club for help.

12. *Why do your students change host families?*

There are several good reasons. First, it exposes them to a variety of ways of family life in the host country so that they get to know the culture better, and with as little bias as possible. A second reason is that if the host family and your child don't happen to match personalities too well, then 3 – 3 1/2 months of "tip toeing around each other" is about all anyone can stand. This isn't usually a significant problem, but it can happen; and it doesn't have to be the case that your child or the family is a "bad guy". On the other hand, if the match between your child and the family is really good, then more than 3 – 3 1/2 months produces a bond that hurts too much to break.

Participants in this program expect to change host families; they've been told. Sometimes host families want to keep students longer than the assigned period. But a good deal of experience has shown that all things considered, it's usually best to change on schedule. And of course, if a serious problem develops in a host family (or between the student and the family), then a new host family will be selected.

13. *How will my child know what they are supposed to do and not to do?*

An orientation meeting will be organized for inbound students soon after your child arrives to help students adjust to the new culture – the different way of doing things. But even before this, there is a list of some forty “first night questions” that inbound students are to discuss with their host family the very first day with them – all sorts of things like “Where do I put my dirty clothes?”, “Where do I hang my towel?”, etc.

14. *Who will meet my child at the airport?*

This varies a bit depending mostly on the location of the destination airport relative to the host family’s home. Normally members of the first host family and sometimes the Rotary counselor will meet an inbound student at the airport. But always, a reliable member of the host family and/or host Rotary club will be on hand to meet an inbound student. Usually there is correspondence between the student and first host family and a welcome from the Rotary counselor before the student arrives to make the student feel welcome and reduce anxiety. A photo of the student with the host family is often made when he/she arrives at the airport and a copy should be sent to the student's family back home. Also, arrangements are usually made for the student to phone home as soon as possible to inform the home family of a safe arrival.

15. How do I get money to my child?

The easiest and least expensive way is to establish a bank account here for your child and send them off with a bank card. ATM machines are almost everywhere now days. The Rotary counselor will advise your student about how to handle money during the exchange. It is part of their job to make any necessary arrangements. The host family may also offer advice.

16. How often may I phone, e-mail my child?

You will want to speak to your child soon after she/he arrives to be sure that they are safe, etc. After that, resist as much as possible. Excessive phone calls and e-mails from home (family and friends) prolongs the adjustment period. Your child will be homesick, but talking to them by phone or e-mailing will only make it worse. We know you don't believe it, but it's true. Excessive contact delays adjustment and adaptation to the new culture – and it postpones the time when your child will be happy again. And, just as sure as it is true that they will be homesick, they will also get over it and be happy. Letting them work through it themselves reduces the pain and suffering all around and hastens adjustment and happiness.

17. OK, I understand – sort of. What is excessive contact?

Of course it varies with the personality of your child and somewhat with their past experience at being away from home – but if you are phoning your child more than once a month (except at special times like birthdays, etc.), then you are probably calling too much for your child's own good – and if you are e-mailing more than once every two weeks, that's probably too much. Your child does not need to know every little thing that happens at home – and especially not every little thing that their friends are doing. Constant contact with friends and family back home prevents adjustment into the new culture – they never leave home! Exchange students need to assimilate into the host family - become a member of the new family – and make new friends in the new host country.

18. What if I want to visit my child while they are on their exchange – Is that a problem?

It depends on how you want to do it. First, you should never visit your child before the last month or two of his/her exchange year, and never during a holiday celebrated in the host country. An earlier visit is very hard on the exchange student. It interrupts the student's adjustment, and when the family member leaves, they must start all over again. And during a holiday in the host country, you would want your child to be free to experience their traditions.

If family members visit their child, then it is usually best to do it after school has ended for the child. However, the child should never return home with their family. They need to say their goodbyes alone. The real family will probably not understand the tears – and even if they do understand, intellectually, they will not understand emotionally – and they may be hurt. It is not that they love their real family less – they certainly don't – it is just that they also love some other people, too, and at that moment they are thinking that they may never see them again.

19. What if I want to travel with my child to their host country? Or, what if I want to go over at the end of my child's exchange and bring them back home with me?

The second question was answered above. Regarding the first, you must set your child free at home. At some point you must trust the program to look after your child – it is best to do it at the beginning – don't take away the exhilarating experience of beginning this new adventure. They will need you when they return home, but not at this time.

20. Will my child be safe in a foreign country? Will they be insulted because they are American?

If your child follows the rules of the program and the instructions of their host family and Rotary counselor, then there is no reason to worry about their safety. Might they be insulted by other students because they are American? It is possible. Not everyone in every country agrees with international policies of our country – but the same thing or something similar could happen here. But such incidents are rarely serious – and after your student makes a few friends, most people will not even think about what political views your child might represent.

21. Do young people in other countries drink, stay out late and use drugs? If some do, how can my child avoid this environment?

Obviously the answer about drinking alcoholic beverages varies with the country. It is true that in few countries is the drinking age as high as it is in the US. It is also true that in many countries young people are allowed (legal or not) to use alcoholic beverages at an age younger than the legal age here. (Although your child is probably an exception, many teenagers here also use alcoholic beverages.) But the question is would your child be expected (or tempted) to drink alcoholic beverages in their host country – and the answer to this question is that they would not be expected to violate any rule that you set for them. Changing environments does not usually change a teenager's notion about what is proper and what is not.

Regarding the use of drugs, there is no evidence that this problem is substantially different in your child's host country than it is here. Regarding the issue of staying out late, say at a disco, this is much more common in most countries than here. However, in most countries teenagers usually go out in groups rather than alone or in pairs – and they aren't permitted to drive cars. In some sense, teenagers are often given more freedom than here. However, their activities are usually at least as safe as those enjoyed by their contemporaries here.

22. Will my child be able to attend church? Will they be forced to go to a particular church?

Your child will not be influenced about their religion. If there is a suitable church in the neighborhood where your child lives, then it is expected that they will be permitted to attend.

23. Will my child be expected to eat foods that they don't like?

This is just like home. Your child would be expected to try foods that their host family deem safe. However, they will certainly not be commanded to like everything that they try. That said, students should try foods of the host country – they are part of the culture - and they might find something that they really like.

24. Will my child be expected to do household chores like washing dishes, etc.?

This varies with families. Some families may have servants that do almost everything. But if host family members have assigned chores, then, as a member of the host family, your child should expect an appropriate assignment. And keep in mind, in just about all over the world, the mother of the home is the one to keep happy around the house.

25. Will my child be expected to change their behavior? For example, my child likes to watch TV, spend a lot of time on the computer and sleep late on Saturday – Will he/she be able to continue this?

Your child will be expected to follow the rules of his/her host family – and if the rules are not clear, then they should ask. Asking about the rules prevents a lot of hard feelings. Your child should expect the household rules to be different – else why go away?

26. Will my child's host family have a computer? And will they be able to use the computer whenever they wish?

Computers are ubiquitous now days – and most families have computers and internet access in their home. However, there are likely to be rules about sharing it – so your child should always ask before using the computer. And by the way, the same goes for the telephone.

27. What will be the rules about using the telephone? If my child has a problem, how will they be able to call me?

As already stated, your child should ask about using the phone. If there is some emergency – like my debit card was eaten by an ATM machine – then the host family or the Rotary counselor would assist. For times like calling home to wish you a happy birthday, your child should get a phone card soon after they arrive in their host country. The Rotary counselor or the host family can assist with this.

28. I understand that people in my child's host country eat differently – use their fork and knife differently – eat with both hands - eat with a spoon - eat with chopsticks. Will my child be expected to eat the same way as his/her host family?

The motto of this program is Adapt, Adapt, Adapt. If the way your child eats offends his/her host family, or if they just want him/her to try their way, then your child should try to accommodate. In most cultures, the differences are not so noticeable, but of course in some, they are very noticeable. If they are different, adapt! That's part of the challenge – and the fun.

29. Will my child have their own bed? Room?

Your child will definitely have his/her own bed. In some cases it may be necessary to share a room with a sibling of the same gender – just as it could be here.

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