



FAQ by Prospective Host Families for Rotary Youth Exchange *Answers to Questions a Family May Ask About...*

1. Who are these students?

High school age students (15-18 1/2, usually 16 or 17) from a variety of countries around the world, both boys and girls.

2. Do they speak English?

Yes, although they may need a little time to adjust to our particular accent and "special terms".

3. What kind of families do they come from?

All kinds, although most parents will be business and/or professional people.

4. How long would a student stay with us?

Usually 3 – 3 1/2 months, although the period may be shorter or longer if you and the Host Rotary Club agree on it. Students usually come in August just before school starts, change host families soon after Thanksgiving, and change again about the beginning of March. They normally go home in June, although sometimes they participate in one of two available Rotary approved tours (Eastern States or Western States) and go home in July.

5. Do they ever stay over to the next school year?

No. Their visa is good for one year only and they must return home country when their year is up.

6. Why do students change host families in this program?

There are several good reasons. First, it exposes them to a variety of ways of family life in our country so that they get to know our culture better, and with as little bias as possible. A second reason is that if you and your student 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 you or the student is a "bad guy". On the other hand, if the match between you and your student is really good, then more than 3 – 3 1/2 months produces a bond that hurts too much to break.

Students expect to change host families; they've been told. Sometimes host families want to keep them 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.

7. Who meets our student when he/she arrives at the airport?

As many of the first host family as is reasonable, and the Rotary Counselor or some other representative of the Host Rotary Club should be there. The first host family should also write to the student before they arrive and welcome them to the USA, to Texas and to their home. A small welcoming gift at the airport also helps a lot to make the student feel welcome. A token is enough – flowers for girls, a correspondingly simple gift for boys is fine. And by the way, don't forget to make a welcome sign with your student's name on it so that they can find you.

Photos should be made of the student with the host family when he/she arrives at the airport and a copy should be sent to the student's family back home. The student should also be encouraged to phone home as soon as possible to inform the home family of a safe arrival. Incidentally, students are expected to pay for their own long distance charges, although it is traditional for the host family or the club to pay for this first call.

8. By the way, what is a "Host Rotary Club"?

The Rotary Club in your community serves as host club for your "inbound" student. Among other responsibilities, they provide an allowance for your student (usually \$75-100 per month) and one of them with knowledge about the program will serve as Counselor for your student. The counselor will meet the student either on arrival or very soon thereafter and assist him/her in getting enrolled in school. He/she will also maintain contact with your student and make sure he/she gets the allowance, usually monthly.

9. What else does the Counselor do?

Although the Club Counselor is advocate for your student, he/she also serves as a resource for you in case some situation develops which either you don't know how to handle or which is a bit too tedious for comfortable direct confrontation. In other words, the Counselor serves as a "go-between" for you and your student on matters which might be awkward for you and/or your student. The Counselor "takes the heat" either direction! It makes things a lot more peaceful around your house! Wouldn't it be nice if you had one for your own children?

10. And what if we don't have children, or they are still small, or they are already gone?

Strangely, it doesn't seem to matter very much. Like everybody else, exchange students come with preconceived notions about the characteristics of the best host family, children, no children, small children, children of the same age, etc. But at the end of the year, they usually think the host families they had were the right ones.

11. If we have children in our family, who "looks after" our exchange student?

Nobody! And everybody! Your exchange student lives as a member of your family, has the same care from and responsibilities to others as any other family member. This includes chores, rules of the house, curfew, choice of friends – same as any other child in the family.

No child in the host family should be expected to "look after" the social life of your student, take him/her along every time they leave home to see a friend, etc. They should treat their exchange brother/sister like other brothers and sisters.

12. What about transportation to school, and other places? Will our student expect to drive our new BMW?

Absolutely not! !! In fact, Rotary Exchange Students are not permitted to operate any motor powered vehicle – automobile, motorboat, tractor, motorcycle, whatever. Rotary is absolutely emphatic about this rule. Violations are grounds for getting sent home early.

13. So how will our student get to and from school?

Any of the usual means is fine. They can walk, ride the school bus, ride with your son or daughter or another school friend, if you approve. Some host parents drive their exchange students to and from school as they may do or may have done with their own. Whatever is reasonable, safe and works for you is good.

14. What about other places our student needs or wants to go? Can't this transportation thing get to be a headache?

If it does, it doesn't usually hurt as much as you think. If your student needs to go to a special school event, someone is just about always going who would take them; if they need to go to a store to buy something, they can usually go with one of the host parents at a time when they happen to be going anyway. Keep in mind that a teenager's needs for transportation are not usually urgent; they can usually be worked into the family schedule. And besides, family togetherness is the essence of this experience.

Two often overlooked solutions to transportation problems are legs and bicycles; and most of our exchange students are much more familiar with these modes of transportation than Texans. Also, walking and riding a bike are not against Rotary rules

15. Speaking of transportation, what about family trips, etc?

Take your student any place you would take your children, especially family trips to see the relatives, on family outings, vacations, etc. If you must make a trip considered inappropriate for your student, call the Rotary Counselor; he/she will just about always know some responsible family who would be delighted to keep your student for a few days while you are away. (Often one of your student's other host families is glad to do it.)

16. Are there rules about trips our student takes?

You bet! Either they must be with you or else approved by you and the Rotary Club Counselor. Often Rotary families will volunteer to take some student along on trips to see something special or some special place they might otherwise not see. If you and the Counselor approve, that's fine. In any case, if your student makes a trip anywhere, you should know all about it and approve; if he/she makes a trip overnight, out of town, the Rotary Counselor should also know, and unless it's with you, he/she should approve in advance.

The Counselor should always know how to reach your student. Think of what you would want for your child if they were living in another country for a year.

17. Will our student have any sort of obligation to the Rotary organization while they are here?

Yes. Several activities will be scheduled during the year for your student along with other Rotary Youth Exchange Students. Most of these are on weekends, but your student may miss some school for such activities. Rotary Exchange Students are obligated to attend some meetings which require them to be gone for two or three days. For example, weekend meetings (two Nights) are held in August or September (for orientation), again in October or November, in February, and at the Rotary District Conference, usually in April. Exit Interviews held in May or early June may also require a weekend meeting.

From time-to-time your student will also be invited to local Rotary Club activities and to some meetings. In fact, he/she will be asked to speak at one or more Rotary Club meetings, usually the local club, but sometimes in another community. If it's out of town, a Rotarian will accompany your student, and of course, provide transportation.

18. Won't all these activities interfere with school?

Not much. Exchange students have been selected and are usually very good students academically, often a little ahead of their age group here. And besides, except for exceptional improvement in language for those who haven't spoken much English, their chief gain will be an understanding of the "American Culture" rather than academic advancement.

19. Well, just what is the purpose of this program, anyway; why are we doing this?

The overall objective of the Rotary Youth Exchange Program is to promote good will and better understanding among the people of the world, and thereby make our whole world a better place in which to live. For the student, it is a life changing experience; it broadens their perspective in a way that nothing else can, and it develops self confidence that will enable them to feel at home and comfortable in almost any environment.

For host families, it is a milestone in the family experience, and often the acquisition of a new family member. It removes anxiety and fear of the word foreign, and indeed, usually relegates the use of the word to "things" rather than "people". Everyone involved begins to feel that they are a part of a community much larger, more comprehensive than what they perceived before.

20. Well, these are very noble ideals, but someone has to ask – How much is this going to cost me?

If you happen to have a son or daughter who goes to another country as a Rotary Youth Exchange Student, it comes out even. In fact, you probably will get ahead, because chances are your son or daughter drives a car, which they can't do as an exchange student, and the associated savings on auto insurance, etc. help to offset the cost of the exchange. Room and food and such are what you will be out for – and most families throw out more food than even a hungry teenager will eat.

As already noted, the Rotary Club will give your student an allowance and your student's own family (overseas) is expected to pay for clothing and such. To put it in usual terms, you will be expected to furnish room and board – that is, a bed in your house and meals with the family. This includes a school lunch, either sent to school or bought in the school lunchroom. If providing a school lunch is a burden, then the host club will usually assist.

If the family goes out to eat, to a movie, or whatever, then your student is treated as a member of the family – same rules about what to order and what not, and with his/her cost as a part of the family bill. But if your student goes to the movie or out to eat with his/her school friends, they pay with their own money from the Rotary Club allowance or from home. The same is true for camera costs, phone costs, hair cuts, etc. Around the house, your student would surely use the family soap, and maybe toothpaste, but buy their own toothbrush, lipstick and hair spray. You can generalize from these examples. But if in doubt, ask the Rotary Counselor.

21. Now that cost has come up, what about medical expenses, the flu, accidents, etc.?

Your student has insurance for medical expenses, including accidents, even liability and repatriation. Any expenses not paid by insurance are paid by his/her parents back home.

An emergency fund will be maintained for your student in a local bank. The Rotary Counselor will assist in setting up the account and in monitoring it. He/she will have access to these funds in case of an emergency. But your student should be encouraged to manage his/her own money; it's part of the experience.

22. Is there anything else we need to know about money?

Well, you can get a \$50 per month reduction on your Federal Income Tax Return for hosting a Rotary Youth Exchange Student!

23. And how do we deal with the 50 million things we forgot to ask about?

Just use the same common sense you would use with children of your own. But don't forget; the Rotary Counselor works for you, too. When in doubt, ask!

24. A cold chill just came over me; what if our student turns out to be that one in a million who "takes drugs", or is an alcoholic, or something?

Call the Rotary Counselor at once when you suspect a problem. He/she will know how to handle it. In the unlikely event this should happen, your student will be sent home immediately, period. The Rotary Counselor keeps your student's passport and (required) return trip ticket during the entire exchange - for safekeeping, yes, but also for such emergencies.

25. Now that it's come up, are there any other reasons why our student might be sent home?

Yes. Of course there could be a serious accident or illness, and flagrant violations of such Rotary rules as operating a motor vehicle can do it. A serious love affair that is getting out of hand can do it. But it's pretty unusual for anything so serious to occur. Rotary Youth Exchange Students are selected and given careful orientation and counseling before they leave home – and they receive more orientation and counseling after they arrive here. And by the way, their parents know "the rules" and they sign agreements to follow them. (They also sign a release for medical treatment, etc.) With very rare exception, Rotary Youth Exchange Students are very fine and honorable young people that you would be glad to adopt as your own.

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