

International Friends of Pittsburg  
**Host Family Program**

***FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS***

You have made the decision to develop a friendship with an international student through International Friends of Pittsburg's host family program – a friendship that may well continue long after the student returns home. If this is your first experience with the host family program, you may find the following information helpful:

**1. Who are the International Friends of Pittsburg?**

We are an autonomous community organization comprised of volunteers from Pittsburg and the surrounding area. International Friends of Pittsburg sponsors the only official host family program for PSU international students. In addition to the host family program, we sponsor a variety of other activities designed to increase the level of cross-cultural awareness in the community and to promote friendship and understanding among people of different cultures.

**2. Who can be a host family?**

Our program is open to anyone interested in friendship with students from other countries: families, couples, single individuals.

**3. Does my student live with me?**

No. Being a host family does not mean that you provide housing for your student. Your only obligation is to help your assigned student feel welcome in the community by providing him / her opportunity to make American friends and to learn more about American culture and traditions.

**4. What are my financial obligations?**

Host families are not responsible for their student's financial support or for helping them with their financial problems. Refer students with financial concerns to the International Programs and Services office in 118 Whitesitt Hall, 235 – 4680.

**5. How do I go about contacting my student the first time?**

When you receive your student's name, address, and phone number, call or email him / her as soon as possible. Explain who you are and express your interest in meeting the student. If you call, it may seem that the student does not understand what you are saying. If this seems to be the case, you might want to follow up your phone call with a letter of welcome. In any event, please contact the student as soon as possible. If you have any problems "making contact," call the International Friends assignments coordinators for assistance. We will have a host/host student reception as a way to meet your student for the first time.

**6. What should I do for the first visit?**

International Friends will host a reception soon after the new host family assignments are made to give the new host families and students an opportunity to meet one another for the first

time. You will be provided with information about the student's country and tips for making your host family experience a mutually beneficial one.

For the first visit on your own, you might want to invite your student(s) to share a meal or an afternoon or evening of conversation. A written invitation can prevent any misunderstandings about time and place of the meeting. Usually, hosts provide transportation for the first meeting. However, if you are unable to do so, be sure to give clear directions.

Don't be surprised if your guest is late. Although Americans may live by the clock, this is not true in many other cultures.

Even if you have not invited your student for a meal, try to offer some light refreshments. You may have to offer them several times because in some cultures it is polite to refuse an offer of refreshments two or three times before accepting.

### **7. What if I invite my student and he / she refuses the invitation?**

Ask again. Remember that a student's primary responsibility is to his / her academic studies and that many students are, in fact, very busy. Repeated refusal of your invitations may indicate a lack of interest on the student's part, however, for whatever reasons, but try not to take it personally. In any event, don't give up after a few attempts. Sometimes, it has taken students and their families several months to get together and they have gone on to have a very successful experience. Don't hesitate to contact the assignments coordinators if you're having problems in this regard.

### **8. How often should I see my student?**

We recommend that you see your student at least once a month. Remember, in addition to their wanting to make American friends and learn about American culture, many students want to have a host family in order to practice their English speaking skills. With that in mind, please try and see your student(s) as often as possible. Every visit need not be a major social event – meeting for coffee or having the students over to keep in touch.

### **9. What kind of things can we do with our students?**

Don't limit your contact with your student(s) to dinner invitations. Learn about your student's interest and include him / her in activities that coincide with those interests: sports, cultural events, club meetings, trips to local attractions, holiday celebrations, picnics, etc.

Many students enjoy playing board games or watching movies. A lot of students enjoy word games, such as Scrabble, Taboo, and Charades because they provide them with opportunities to improve their English speaking skills.

### **10. What do we talk about?**

Be sure to ask the student about his / her family, country, and culture and to show a genuine interest in what the student has to say. Don't simply focus on "Well, how do you like Pittsburg?" Learn as much as you can about your student's country and cultural background. The student is, of course, your best resource for learning about his / her culture. Be prepared for questions about our political system and trends in American society. Your student may ask

questions that we generally consider inappropriate, such as “How much money do you make?” or “How much did that cost?” Politely explain that you would rather not answer some questions.

**Anything else I should know?**

Some students may have religious or cultural dietary restrictions. When inviting a student for dinner, be sure to ask if he / she observes any such traditions. Some students are vegetarians, some do not eat pork, while others do not eat beef or shellfish. Generally, chicken is a “safe” meat to serve and rice is a good choice since it is a staple in many countries. Many students who live in campus housing and eat their meals in the dining hall miss rice.

Please respect your student’s religion. International Friends does not permit proselytizing among its volunteers. It is permissible to invite a student to a religious activities, such as church, but make clear to the student the nature of the activity and that is all right to decline the invitation.

International Friends of Pittsburg will provide additional material on a variety of subjects to assist you in your “host family” experiences.