

Forte International Exchange Association



Host Family Handbook

529 14th Street NW, Suite 270
Washington, DC 20045

Toll-Free: 1-888-893-6783
Tel: 202-628-8226 Fax: 202-296-8685

www.orgsites.com/dc/forte

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I. Introduction

Every year Forte International Exchange Association (FIEA) brings high school students from countries around the world to the US for one academic year (Approximately 10 months), or one academic semester (approximately 5 months). Host families offer our students extraordinary opportunities to learn more about American culture. By actually living in the United States with American host families and attending American high schools, exchange students acquire a more profound understanding of the unique threads woven together to create our culture. In exchange, these young ambassadors interact first-hand with their host families, communities, schools, and peers to share the culture of their home country and change the way people view their world.

This host family handbook will give you an overview of the program, FIEA guidelines and rules, and an idea of what is expected of host families. This guide is a useful reference. Your FIEA local representative and national representative (DC office) are also available to answer any questions or offer advice.

II. Host family responsibilities

An important part of your student's stay in the US is his or her relationship with you, the host family. Through their home-stay, they will not only improve their English but also learn about American daily life in your community. FIEA seeks families that are enthusiastic about our student exchange program and are willing to host our exchange students wholeheartedly. Host families need to provide a safe and loving home for the exchange student and should enjoy sharing their thoughts and experiences with the new student.

1. A host family should provide love, moral support and basic needs to the exchange student as if he or she were a member of the family.
2. While the student's natural family still serves as his or her legal guardian, the host family is expected to supervise the student's academic performance, social conduct and health during the entire duration of his or her stay in the US. Any misconduct of the student should be reported to the local representative and Forte International staff in Washington DC in a timely manner.
3. The host family should do its best to help the exchange student adjust to American culture, and take him or her to as many social activities as possible.
4. The host family is expected to pick up its student from the airport upon his or her arrival, and see him or her off upon departure.
5. Host families open the door to our students sharing and learning new cultural perspectives from their students.
6. Except for food and lodging, the host family is not expected to cover any other expenses for the student. The student brings his/her own spending money.

7. Each host family and student are expected to work out an agreement regarding the student's extracurricular activities like athletic team practice, social gatherings, parties, movies etc. The host family shall only provide assistance to the level it feels comfortable.

8. All FIEA students are under medical/accident insurance coverage. In case of any medical emergencies, the host family is expected to send the student to a hospital and sign any required documents with the rights pre-approved by the student's biological parents.

9. If there is a change of circumstances in the host family, such as early termination of hosting, the host family should inform FIEA and its local representative as soon as possible. Forte International Exchange Association and the local representative will arrange for another family to host the student.

10. If the placement of the student doesn't work out satisfactorily, Forte International Exchange Association will take the responsibility to place the student with another family. Many conflicts between students and the families are caused by cultural misunderstandings. Our trained and professional staff is available to support your family 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We will provide guidance and support to both the student and the family to prevent further conflicts. If conflicts remain unresolved, Forte International will make arrangements to find a replacement family.

11. If the host family has an emergency, the local rep should be notified immediately. The local rep should be informed of the family's situation so that arrangements, **if necessary**, can be made to place the student in a temporary home during the family crisis.

12. Host families are also required to talk with the local representative at least once a month.

III. Hosting your student

a. Preparing for your student's arrival

You will be provided with information on your student's home country before your student arrives. It may be useful to read about the region where your student is from. Reading up about your student's homeland region will help you understand their culture more and also provide ideas for conversation. An FIEA representative can answer any country/cultural questions that you may have.

If you learn about your student placement early enough, it will be useful to correspond with the student before he or she arrives. You may gain insight into the student's personality, likes, dislikes and expectations. The student's parents will also be more at ease knowing more about you and the school that their child will be attending.

If there are teenagers in your neighborhood who are the same age as your student, it may be helpful to contact them. Ask them if they might show the student around the school or bring him or her to a few social events. This could help the student feel a little more at home when he or she first arrives so he or she will not feel so alone.

b. Useful items

Once a student match has been made for your family, you can begin to prepare your home for his or her arrival. Although the student does not necessarily need to have his or her own room, we require that his or her own bed with sheets, a pillow and blanket is provided. Please provide a desk if possible and somewhere to store clothes and personal items as well. Some other useful items include:

- An alarm clock or clock radio
- Reading or desk lamp
- Towels and washcloths
- Other small touches to make him or her feel at home

c. Student arrival

Once we make a student placement for you, and know of your student's flight information, we will let you know. Expect that plans could change according to visa status and rates effected by peak travel time.

At least one member of the host family should meet the student at the airport upon arrival. When he or she first arrives, it may be a little confusing. Be sure to hold a clear sign with his or her name on it so that s/he can identify you easily. Feel free to welcome your student with balloons or flowers for the extra touch.

When you first arrive at home with the student, you will all probably be very excited. Some students will be eager to talk and take in as much as possible. Others may be completely jetlagged and exhausted. Show the student his or her room and around the house. Let him or her know where things are kept and how things work. Keep in mind that the first few hours are quite overwhelming so s/he might not remember everything you have told him. Give your student time to unpack and rest.

d. Getting to know your student

During the first few days, you will probably be eager to ask your students questions about his or her trip, weather in the student's home country, his or her family and why he or she decided to come to the US to study. In return, your student will be just as eager to get to know you. Don't be surprised, however, if the first few days are a little awkward. Give the student time to adjust and after a while he or she will start to feel more comfortable in your home.

e. Being sensitive to cultural differences

It is important to remember that different countries have different cultural and political background from the US. As a result, students may have a completely different set of values from you. It's important to involve your student in as many activities with you as possible so that he or she has a good balance of academic and social life.

Keep in mind that your perception of good manners may differ from your student's. While in some countries silence may be rude, in others it is a sign of respect. Your student may be extremely polite and readily use thank-you and please, or it may take a period of adjustment. Your student's level of modesty may also differ from your own.

f. Hygiene

Hygiene may also be an issue with your student. Some students may not be accustomed to showering every day or they may wear the same clothes two days in a row. This topic will be addressed to the students before they leave. If you find yourself in a situation where it is awkward to address your student about his or her hygiene habits (or lack of), please let us know so that we may delicately handle the situation.

g. Involving your student in activities

Do your best to help the exchange student adjust to American culture. Take them to as many social activities as possible. Participating in activities with you is a good way for him or her to experience his or her new home.

h. Language adjustment

In the first few weeks, your student may also be overwhelmed with adjusting to the English language. He or she may be afraid to make mistakes and may also misunderstand the meaning of what you are trying to say sometimes. It is helpful to speak slowly and avoid using slang. Be patient and help your student with pronunciation and sentence structure. Before long, your student will communicate with more ease.

i. Culture Shock

Students experience several stages of emotions and culture shock during their year or semester in the US. At times they may feel uncertain and anxious but as time goes by they will begin to take in their new experiences as part of their everyday life. Over the months they will adjust to their life here and begin to feel more at home. Here are some emotions your student may experience in the coming months:

1) Excitement and curiosity - Students are typically excited about their new surroundings and experiences when they first arrive. Comparisons between life in the US and in the student's home country may be made. This stage typically lasts for about a month but varies for all students.

2) Anxiety and shock- After the euphoria wears off, some students experience shock when noticing the differences between the US and their country. Your student may become disoriented and homesick. This is completely normal and he or she may want to spend more time alone. They may want to call home a little more than usual. Keep the lines of communication open and talk to your student about how he or she feels so you know where he or she is coming from.

3) Comfort- After getting through stage 2, students begin to feel more comfortable with their surroundings. This happens around the third or fourth month of stay. Surroundings do not seem so new or foreign anymore and your student will begin to feel more at home.

4) Confidence- Towards the end of the stay, the student will feel like a part of your family and will enjoy his or her life here.

These emotions may be typical for exchange students, but every student's experience varies. Some students may experience all these feelings but at different stages while others may not experience some of these feelings at all.

IV. Your Local Representative

a. What is a local rep?

Your local rep lives in your area and is available for advice, questions, and problem solving. He or she is actively involved in your local community and knows about its different aspects. Your local rep has been trained to serve as a liaison between you, your student, your student's school and FIEA headquarters in Washington DC.

You should have already met your local representative during your in-home interview and evaluation as well as during the host-family orientation. Once your student has arrived, your local rep will also play an important role in helping guide both your family and the student through the year together.

Both you and your student will be provided with your local rep's contact information where you can reach him or her when needed. Most communication with your local rep will be by telephone. Once your student has been placed with you, we ask that you contact your local rep at least once a month to let him or her know how things are coming along. Even if you are having a positive experience, it's good to check in.

b. How can my local rep help?

Most local reps are familiar with the students' culture and are therefore aware of cultural differences. Many misunderstandings between students and host families are caused by these differences. In situations like this, your local representative will act as a mediator and provide guidance and support to prevent further conflicts from happening. Good things to remember:

- Any misconduct of the student should be reported to the local rep and FIEA International staff in Washington DC in a timely manner.
- If the host family has planned a vacation and cannot bring the student along, the local rep should be notified in advance. The local rep should be informed of the family's schedule so that arrangements can be made to place the student in a temporary home while the family is away.
- If there is a change of circumstances in the host family, such as early termination of hosting, the host family should inform the local rep and FIEA headquarters as soon as possible. We will then make arrangements to place the student with another family.

In addition to your local rep, you can always contact staff at FIEA headquarters in Washington, DC. We love to hear from you so don't hesitate to contact us.

V. Student Rules

The following is a list of rules that all Forte exchange students must follow. Your student knows that these rules are in place and by being a Forte exchange student has agreed to abide by these rules while in our program.

Forte International Exchange Student Rules and Regulations:

1. All activities of the student must be approved by his/her Host Parents. The student shall keep the host parents informed about where and with whom the student is at all times and the expected time of his or her return home.
2. A student may not purchase, possess or consume alcoholic beverages unless he or she is twenty-one years old. FIEA students shall not drink any alcoholic beverages including beer and wine while in the United States.
3. Purchase, possession, or use of any illicit drug or association with anyone involved with drugs in any way, shall be cause for any FIEA Student to be returned to his/her country.
4. FIEA students may not drive cars or motorcycles or other motorized vehicles at any time during his or her stay in the U.S. If a student drives any car or motorized vehicle under any circumstances, the student will be returned to his/her home country.
5. School attendance is mandatory. If the student fails to follow school rules, exhibits behavioral problems at school, or fails academically he or she may be sent home.
6. FIEA students are not allowed to travel outside the local area either alone or with other teenagers. The local representative of FIEA will define the local area. Over-night traveling is allowed only with an approved group, such as a school or church-sponsored group approved by FIEA, or with an adult approved by the host family and FIEA.
7. FIEA discourages students from visiting their family members living in the United States unknown by the natural parents and/or the American host family. Written permission from natural parents, permission from the Host Parents and a letter of invitation from the family the student wishes to visit are required. A student found to be in violation of this condition will be returned to his or her home country.
8. FIEA students are discouraged from visiting their home country during their stay in the United States, with the exception of a medical emergency within the immediate natural family. Students returning to their home country during an FIEA program MUST obtain permission from the FIEA Office in Washington, DC.
9. If a student travels outside of the United States with his/her host family, he/she must always check first with U.S. immigration officials to make sure he/she will be allowed to re-enter.
10. Students are forbidden from hitchhiking while in the United States. In many states, hitchhiking is **illegal** and hitchhiking is also considered to be very **dangerous!**
11. Students are not permitted to take a job during their stay in the United States, except intermittent jobs in the neighborhood such as lawn care or baby-sitting.
12. If in the student's application he/she said that he/she does not smoke, the student may not smoke during his/her stay in the host country. If the student is a smoker, he/she must discuss

his/her smoking habits with his/her host family and follow their regulations. At all times, state laws regarding tobacco purchase, possession and use by minors must be obeyed.

13. Violation of any local, State or Federal Law in the U.S. will cause the student to be sent home.

14. Students are not allowed to remain in the United States after the FIEA exchange program is completed. All students shall return to their home country as a group. Students who do not leave upon program completion will be reported to Immigration and Naturalization Services as required by law.

15. Students must respect and obey all decisions made by FIEA officials. Failure to abide by these rules and decisions may result in return home without warning or a second chance, and any additional expense that are incurred shall be the responsibility of the student and his or her natural parents and or legal/guardians.

16. FIEA students participate in the student exchange program to learn about the United States, both culturally and academically, therefore all FIEA students need to be willing to make adjustments accordingly to adapt to their host family, community, and school.

If any of these rules are broken, we have different ways of dealing with the problem. Any misconduct of the student should be reported to the local rep and FIEA staff in Washington DC in a timely manner. We will contact the student to discuss the problem. Depending on the severity of the problem, the student will likely be verbally warned first. Multiple offenses are a possible reason for sending a student back home.

VI. Guidelines

a. Setting rules at home:

Every family will have their own set of rules and guidelines. It's important to establish rules with your student from the very beginning. Put the rules in writing so that the student can refer to them. This also helps if the student didn't understand some aspects of the rules when they were discussed verbally. This will also prevent any misunderstanding in the future. Students need to know your guidelines for phone use; curfews; going out, household chores, etc.

Each host family and their student are expected to work out an agreement regarding scheduling and transportation to the student's extracurricular activities like athletic team practice, social gatherings, parties, movies etc.

b. Emergency situations:

In addition to establishing a set of rules, it's important that you go over all emergency contact information with your student in the first week. Write down a list of home, work and cell telephone numbers where your student can reach you at all times. Your student has an "Emergency Contact Information" list on page 18 of his or her Student Handbook. A good activity may be to sit down with your student and fill out the list together. Also go over the procedure of what to do in emergency situations.

c. Chores:

Like any American teenager, your student can be expected to perform household chores. Typical and normal chores include making the bed, washing dishes, keeping the bedroom tidy, and laundry. Other chores may include setting the dinner table, taking out the trash, vacuuming, or cleaning the bathroom. When you establish your rules with your student in the beginning, be sure to discuss any chores that may be expected of him or her. Be open to your student not being so accustomed to performing certain chores. You may have to show him or her how to use the washing machine (including separating darks from lights) or the dishwasher.

d. Telephone and Computer Use:

Your student will want to occasionally make long distance calls to their home country. He or she will be responsible for paying for any calls made when the bill arrives. Students are encouraged to purchase pre-paid telephone calls. Prepaid cards can be purchased at local supermarkets and drug stores. Prepaid cards allow students to make calls on their own funds without owing the host family any money.

e. Spending money:

FIEA recommends that each student bring about \$1000 in traveler's checks. This money should finance any personal expenses during the year. You are not responsible for covering his or her personal expenses. We advise you not to lend money to your student. If you feel he or she is not receiving enough money or spending excessively, your local rep should be contacted. Students will need to contact their natural families if they are experiencing financial difficulties.

Students will be advised to open their own checking or savings account at a local bank. Do not keep your student's money in your bank account.

f. Student travel while in the United States:

Many students will want to travel to other places in the United States during their year here in the US. While we encourage them to travel and see as much of the country as possible, certain guidelines need to be followed:

- FIEA students are not allowed to travel outside the local area without their host parents' permission. Over-night travel is allowed only with an authorized group, such as a school or church-sponsored group, or with an adult authorized by the host family and FIEA.
- Students traveling with their host family **do not** need permission from FIEA. Host families may also approve of travel with other families or student groups. Unless you offer to pay, students will be responsible for paying for themselves while traveling with you on family trips.
- FIEA discourages students from visiting their relatives or family members in the United States known by the natural parents or the American host family. If a student plans to visit relatives or friends, he/she has to show an invitation letter and get permission from Forte and host family as well.
- FIEA does not permit travel outside the US (i.e. to Canada or Mexico) without permission from our national office first. The terms of your student's visa may not allow him/her to travel outside the United States.

g. Health Insurance:

Students receive health coverage through FIEA. Students have a copy of the insurance as well as and ID card for their wallet. Your family will also be provided with a copy of the student insurance. Please call our staff in Washington with any insurance questions.

Please note that this plan does not cover routine check-ups, immunizations or pre-existing conditions.

VII. Making your hosting experience a success!

- Be sensitive to cultural differences and the different stages of culture shock.

- Talk to your student regularly. Keep the line of communication open so you know how they are doing.

- Be patient, especially as the student adjusts to the English language or to eating new foods.

- Involve your student in as many activities with you as possible; such as community activities, family functions, and holidays.

- Monitor your student's progress in school and offer assistance to them whenever possible.

- Keep in touch with your local rep and FIEA staff here in Washington, DC. Let them know how you are coping or if you have any problems. We like to hear good news as well!

- Pay attention to your student and provide time and love. This will help make your experience memorable!

Student Emergency Contact List

Host Family Information:	
Mother (M):	Father (F):
Address:	
Home Phone:	
Cell Phone:	(M)
	(F)
Work Phone:	(M)
	(F)
Local Representative:	
Name:	
Phone Number:	
Email:	
National Forte Office:	
Phone Numbers:	202-628-8226
	1-888-893-6783 (toll-free)
Email Address:	info@forteintl.com
Address:	529 14 th Street NW, Suite 270 Washington, DC 20045
Program Assistant:	Name:
	Email:

Other Important Numbers:

Host Family Contact List

National Forte Office:	
Phone Numbers:	202-628-8226
	1-888-893-6783 (toll-free)
Email Address:	info@forteintl.com
Address:	529 14 th Street NW, Suite 270 Washington, DC 20045
Program Assistant:	Name:
	Email:

Local Representative:	
Name:	
Phone Number:	
Email:	

Student's Insurance Information:	
Name:	
Policy Number:	

Additional Contacts:	