

Forte International Exchange Association



Student Orientation 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

Welcome to FIEA Orientation!

FIEA is delighted to have you with us in the US

The purpose of this orientation packet and the student handbook is to help you prepare for your stay in America as part of the Forte International Exchange Association Program. It will provide you with information on the program and give you an idea of what to expect from yourself, your host family and Forte during your stay in the US. It will also explain the rules that you are expected to abide by and your responsibilities.

During your stay in the U.S., you will learn a lot about yourself and how to deal with many situations. Forte will assist you with your transition to life in a different culture and a new family. You have a Local Representative whom you can always call with questions or problems. You may also contact the National Director or Forte Headquarters.

We hope that this packet will be helpful and that you will refer to it when you have questions.

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Who can help you?

Please take a moment to identify and make note of your Forte contacts. Your Local Representative is your personal contact, and should be the first person you call for all student questions, issues, or emergencies. Your National Director oversees all the placements in the US.

The National Director is:

Jean Chang

Email: jean@forteintl.com

Phone: 1-888-893-6783

The Program Manager is:

Sarah Crockett

Email: sarah@forteintl.com

Phone: 1-888-893-6783

Your Local Representative is:

Name:

Phone:

Email:

1. You should be in contact with your local representative at least once a month; if he/she doesn't call you then you should call or email him/her.
2. Your local representative is available for you to discuss problems with **OR** just to talk.
3. Call your local representative about:
 - School Problems
 - Host Family Problems
 - Travel
 - Insurance
 - Illness
 - If you just need to confide in a friend

Things to Expect When Living With an American Host Family & Culture in the United States

The Host Family and the Student

Your Host Family might not be what you envisioned before coming to the United States. It takes time and effort to know the family and learn their way of life. **Do not judge or compare them to your family at home.** Your family here will be different and that is why you are here----to experience a new way of life.

Remember that the families get no payment whatsoever. They are responsible for providing you a place to stay as well as food in the house. They obviously really want you there, because they have opened their home to you without expecting any money in return.

What do American families expect from their Exchange Student? They would like to share with you and for you to respond and take an active part in their lives. They do not want a guest in the house--- they want another family member.

Most importantly—You are expected to adjust to the family's way and culture; the family is not required to change to your ways and culture.

Safety & Security

It is your Host Family's responsibility to provide you with a safe and secure living environment. You might not get the "perfect" family or the "perfect" room. You have to be flexible and tolerant in your new surroundings. You should be adjusting to the American culture and way of life, but communicate with your family about how you are doing and feeling so they can learn about you and make you feel at home. They want you to be happy.

Remember however, you should never feel like you are putting yourself in danger by being in your new home. Contact your Local Representative or the Washington, DC office IMMEDIATELY if you are ever harmed in any way; this can be in the form of sexual, physical, or mental abuse. If there is an EMERGENCY, you can call 911 and ask for help. This number should only be called in a seriously dangerous situation.

You should never be made to participate in or watch activities that you feel are wrong. If you start to get an uncomfortable feeling about your living situation, you should call your Local Representative. They can help you fix the problem before things get out of hand.

Individualism and Self-Reliance

Most Americans think that the “ideal” person is someone who is independent and self-reliant. Most American teenagers will try to do things on their own without asking for help unless they really need it. Many teenagers, but not all, prepare their own meals and do their own laundry. The majority of teens move away from home to attend college after high school. Their independence and self-reliance help them adjust easily to living unsupervised by a parent. They are comfortable being responsible for themselves. Still, most parents like it when their son or daughter comes to them for help. Never be afraid to ask your host parents for help, they will always be happy to help you!

Equality

In the United States, men and women are considered to be equal. In many families, both parents work. Parents, and sometimes children, share household responsibilities. Some men do laundry, dishes, and chores that may be considered “a woman's job” in other countries. Some women mow the lawn, shovel snow, change the oil in the car and do other chores that may be considered “a man's job”. Do not be insulted if someone asks you to help him or her with something that you think is “a man's job” or “a woman's job”. They ask you to help because they consider you as their equal. Treating a man or a woman unequally is insulting; please try to avoid doing this to maintain a good relationship with your host family, your teachers, and your peers.

Pets

Families in America often keep animals as pets. The most common pets are dogs and cats. But Americans also keep birds, rodents like hamsters and guinea pigs, fish, as well as reptiles like snakes or even lizards. In your home country you might not treat these animals as pets. You are in a different culture now and you must respect it. Remember to always be kind to your family's pets and NEVER mistreat them in any way. Often, Americans treat their pets as another member of the family! If you are scared of them, just tell your family, and they will understand if you don't want to be around the animal. They will help you with the situation, either by keeping the animal away from you, or helping you to get used to the pet so you are not scared of it anymore.

Meals

Meals at home are provided. Some, but not all, American families eat meals together. If your host family has their meals together, you will be expected to participate. If your Host Family takes you out to eat, you should offer to pay for your own meal. If the Host Family insists on paying, you should certainly smile and say thank you. If you wish to buy lunch at school or other food outside the home, you must pay for that yourself. For school lunches you will usually take a sandwich and fruit that you have to prepare before going to school. Refrigerator food and snack food in the kitchen is for the whole family. You must always consider this before you take the last piece of anything.

Cooking

Some families may ask you to cook a traditional dinner of your home country for them on occasion. They might want to try new things and learn about what you are used to eating. You may be asked to make your own lunch or breakfast and/or lunch. Most American teenagers do this.

Table Etiquette

Every country has different "rules" for how one should behave while eating. Many American families eat their meals together. You should eat dinner when it is served to the family. Always wash your hands before meals. Wait until everyone is seated before you begin eating. Put your napkin in your lap and do not put your elbows on the table. Use utensils, if they are available, to serve and eat food. Chew quietly and with your mouth closed. Do not talk with your mouth full. Do not slurp soup or any other liquids. Do not lick your fingers; use your napkin. Do not burp, and if you do burp accidentally, always say, "Excuse me". Do not reach for food, if you cannot reach it easily, always ask someone else to pass it to you. When a meal is finished, help the family clean off the table and carry dishes to the sink. Always say thank you to the cook!

Babysitting

Some families have young children and they may ask you on occasion to supervise them. This is something that is often expected from older siblings and not everyone will get paid for their time. You may be expected to baby-sit for free from time to time. You should work out a system in the beginning with your host family. You should not be asked to baby-sit more than a few hours a week without pay or compensation of some sort. If you feel that your family is asking you to baby-sit too much please let us know.

Chores

In most American families, children are expected to perform chores. They sometimes receive a small allowance for this, but not always. You will probably be asked to clean up after yourself, make your bed, wash your dishes, clean your room and possibly do your own laundry **without** an allowance. This is what is expected of most American teenagers. If you do not know how to do something, please ask your host family. They will be happy to show you. You may be asked to do additional chores as well, such as cooking the family dinner, vacuuming, washing the windows, dusting, and sweeping, which may or may not be rewarded with an allowance. These are things that are usually done on a weekly basis. You may also be asked to teach the family some words in your native language. We encourage this, and it should be fun for you and not feel like a chore. Ask your host family what your responsibilities will be in the house. Remember if you feel like you are being asked to do too much, please let us know.

Laundry

Most families do not do laundry every day. Some families may only do laundry once or twice a week. If your host family does your laundry you will be expected to wait until laundry day. If you need to wash your clothes on days that the family doesn't do laundry please talk to your host family. They will show you how to use the washer and dryer and let you know how often and what hours are appropriate for washing your clothes. You probably will not be permitted to do your laundry every day.

Church

Many American Families go to church on a regular basis. It is important for you to attend church and other functions with the family. It does **not** mean that you must accept the family's beliefs, but you should show an interest in the family's traditions. Going to church

and other events is also a way to meet more people and experience another part of American life. Many churches offer social experiences for young people.

*Youth group is a social group for teenagers, which is usually affiliated with a church. They often go on outings to the movies, camping, or have dances or other functions. Participating in youth group activities is a great way to meet other teenagers and the activities are usually a lot of fun. You do not need to be of any certain religion nor do you need to convert to join.

Phone

If you are going to make a call to your home country, please use a calling card unless you work out an arrangement with the family to pay for the calls once the bill arrives. All calls placed by the student that are direct dial calls go straight to the host family's phone bill! Calls made in this manner are the sole responsibility of the student. These calls are to be paid for immediately in time for that month's payment of the phone bill. Forte does not condone any student's disregard of phone responsibility. Failure to adhere to phone rules of the host family could result in the loss of phone privileges in the home.

Overseas telephone calls are very expensive and have been a cause of severe shock and financial trauma to exchange students and host families! Phone bills for hundreds and even thousands of dollars have been received in a single month! Exchange students are encouraged to purchase a **prepaid** telephone card available locally at department or convenience stores.

Most families only have one phone line so be considerate and do not be on the phone too long. Many families understand if you talk to your parents **once a week** for an hour, but if you talk to them that much every day it is too much. Be **respectful** of the other people in the family. In addition, most families do not like for someone to call them after 10 PM or before 6:30 AM, please especially let your friends and parents who are in a different time zone know this.

Internet/Computer

If your host family has a computer, they may set hours for when you will be able to use it. Please respect their wishes. One hour per day on the computer should be more than enough time to complete any homework assignments or to send and receive email. You should **NOT** spend all of your free time on the computer or telephone, chatting, writing, and speaking in your native language. It will **NOT** help you to practice and improve your English. Excessive use of the computer, with or without permission, is unacceptable behavior and can result in warning or probation. If you download material that offends members of the host family, this can create problems that will cause tension and be hard to mend. Inappropriate use of the computer can result in a total loss of computer privileges.

Curfews

If you would like to go out with your friends at night, you will probably be given a curfew. On school nights it is only acceptable to go out on special occasions or to attend an event. On the weekend, your curfew will usually, but not always, be between 10 and midnight. Your host family will discuss your curfew with you. Please be courteous and respect their wishes.

Punctuality

Most Americans are very punctual and have their activities planned on a schedule. Being late is considered rude. If you cannot be on time, you should contact the people that you are meeting to notify them that you will be late. If you arrive late, you should apologize to the person that you kept waiting.

Manners

In the United States, you should express gratitude when someone does something for you or gives you something. If you do not say "thank you" after a person gives you a gift, he or she may think that you did not like the gift. If you do not say "thank you" after someone does something for you, he or she may feel unappreciated and may be less likely to help you the next time that you need it. When someone tells YOU thank you, be sure to always say, "You're welcome." Always be sure to use "please" when asking for help or anything else. People who do not use these courtesy phrases are often considered ungrateful, disrespectful, or rude.

Hygiene

In the United States, hygiene is VERY important. Body odor and bad breath are considered to be offensive. This is why the American society has so many products to cover up bad smells such as perfumes, scented lotions and candles, deodorants, antiperspirants, toothpaste, mouthwash, and breath mints. Shower at least once daily and **always** following any rigorous exercise. Change all of your clothing daily, including undergarments and socks. Wash your hands after using the bathroom and before all meals. Sleep between the sheets and wear separate clothing to sleep in. Brush your teeth every day (most Americans brush their teeth 2-3 times a day).

Family Activities

Most American families have one or more children and plan activities together. You should always participate when you are asked to join in the fun. They are wonderful opportunities to learn new things and to get closer to your family. Eat dinner with your family if they eat all together, it is a great time to chat. Sometimes families spend the evenings together watching television or playing games. Parents often use these times to talk with their children (**including YOU**) about what everyone did during the day and to discuss future plans or other family matters. **You** are a member of this family so **use this time to talk to them!**

Socializing

Try to be open and accept invitations to go new places or do new things. You will learn something new and make new friends in the process. If you accept an invitation, you are expected to be on time. It is considered rude to accept an invitation and then not show up. When you are invited to do something or go somewhere and you are not sure what to wear, always ask beforehand. While most invitations are informal, some invitations are formal and you should wear nice clothing and shoes. Two examples of formal events are church services and school dances.

Interest in YOU

Most families host students from other countries to learn more about those countries and meet new people. It is a wonderful opportunity for you to learn about the United States and for the host family to learn about your country. During your stay, your host family will encourage you to try new things. You will learn a lot from them. Ask a lot of questions, your host family will be happy to answer them! In addition, you should share with what your life was like for you at home. Tell them about the differences between life here in the U.S. and in your country. Show them pictures and tell them about your family. Share recipes for food from your province. Teach them how to say something in your language. Your host family will be very excited to have someone so different in their home and they will be very eager to learn more about you!

Nonverbal Communication

When speaking with someone, you should try to keep eye contact with him or her. If you do not look into their eyes, they may think that you are not listening, that you are not interested, or that you are not telling the truth.

Communication

It is very important to communicate with your host family! They cannot read your mind. Let them know if something is bothering you or if you have any questions. If you do not feel like you can speak to your host family about something, please talk to your Local Representative or the Washington, DC office. This is one of the most important keys to having a great year in the United States. If you are having a problem, but you do not let anyone know then the problem can never be fixed. Your host family wants you to have a great year, but you need to talk with them if you are having a problem or if you have a question.

***Please contact a Forte International Representative if you feel that your host parents are not treating you respectfully or reasonably. It is important to us that you enjoy your time in the United States.**



How to prevent abuse while in the USA for exchange

What Is Student Abuse?

"Student abuse" can be defined as causing or permitting any harmful or offensive contact on a student's body; and, any communication or transaction of any kind which humiliates, shames, or frightens the student. Some student development experts go a bit further, and define student abuse as any act or omission, which fails to nurture or in the upbringing of the students.

The Student Abuse Prevention and Treatment defines student abuse and neglect as: "at a minimum, any recent act or failure to act on the part of a host parents, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm."

A student of any age, sex, race, religion, and socioeconomic background can fall victim to student abuse and neglect. There are many factors that may contribute to the occurrence of student abuse and neglect. Host parents may be more likely to maltreat their students if they abuse drugs or alcohol. Some host parents may not be able to cope with the stress resulting from the changes and may experience difficulty in caring for their students.

Major types of student abuse are: Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, & Sexual student Abuse, Neglect. (Physical neglect, educational neglect, emotional neglect)

Emotional Abuse: (also known as: verbal abuse, mental abuse, and psychological maltreatment) Includes acts or the failures to act by host parents or caretakers that have caused or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders. This can include host parents/caretakers using extreme and/or bizarre forms of punishment, such as confinement in a closet or dark room or being tied to a chair for long periods of time or threatening or terrorizing a student. Less severe acts, but no less damaging are belittling or rejecting treatment, using derogatory terms to describe the student or habitual blaming.

Neglect: The failure to provide for the student's basic needs. Neglect can be physical, educational, or emotional. Physical neglect can include not providing adequate food, supervision, or proper weather protection (heat). It may include fail of hosting. Educational neglect includes failure to provide appropriate schooling or special educational needs, allowing excessive trancies. Psychological neglect includes the lack of any emotional support and love, never attending to the student, spousal abuse, drug and alcohol abuse including allowing the student to participate in drug and alcohol use.

Physical Abuse: The inflicting of physical injury upon a student. This may include, burning, hitting, punching, shaking, kicking, beating, or otherwise harming a student. The

host parents may not have intended to hurt the student, the injury is not an accident. It may, however, been the result of over-discipline or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the student's age.

Sexual Abuse: The inappropriate sexual behavior with a student. It includes fondling a student's genitals, making the student fondle the adult's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism and sexual exploitation. To be considered student abuse these acts have to be committed by a person responsible for the care of a student (for example a local representative, a parent, or a host sibling) or related to the student. If anyone commits these acts, it would be considered sexual assault and handled solely be the police and criminal courts.

How do you report suspected student abuse?

Once you find that anyone has done any of the above described activities to you, keep distance to this person and report it immediately to below phone numbers:

Jean Chang (Program Director): 1-888-893-6783

Local Representative: _____

Or 911

Above numbers are toll free and are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Forte will take immediate actions, such as to contact our local representative in your area and you to get detailed information; file report immediately to police so the policy could take immediate actions, inform student's parents and overseas agents. In most cases, if your report has been defined as abuse, you will be moved to an other host family immediately unless there will be certain guarantee the person will not be near you again. If it is not convenient for you to make this kind of phone calls from the host family, you can do it from any payphone, or you can simply tell us that you want to talk to our local representative so we will inform our local representative in your area to visit you in your host family immediately. Or you can call us from your neighbor's house where it is safe. **If it is under extremely urgent situation, which you think it can be very harmful to you or even life threatening, please call 911 immediately. You just tell them where you are located, and the policeman will be there immediately.** Please remember that it is our responsibility to provide you with safe environment while having exchange in the USA. We will do whatever we can to protect you and to let you have pleasant experiences while in the USA.

Rules and Regulations for Exchange Students

The following is a list of student rules. If any of these rules are broken, we have different ways of dealing with the problem. You will be contacted by your local rep and FIEA staff here in Washington DC to discuss the problem. Depending on the severity of the problem you will likely be warned at first. However, multiple offenses are cause for sending a student back home.

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. FORTE 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 family members living in the United States known 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 not permitted to visit 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. The student may not smoke during his/her stay in the host country.
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 is 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.

