

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, INC.



**AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP
PARTNER PROGRAM**

STUDENT & SCHOLAR GUIDEBOOK

Dear Student,

It is a pleasure to welcome you as a participant in the American Friendship Partner Program. Many students have found lifelong friendships with Americans through these relationships.

The coordinators between you and your host family are Eric and Melody Craven. They are with International Students, Inc. Please feel free to contact them.

Address: 5720 Grand Ave., Kansas City, MO 64113

Phone: 816-363-1647

E-mail: mcraven@isionline.org

You may also contact Carol Douglass in case you have questions or problems. She is the City Director for International Students, Inc. here in Kansas City.

Address: 8000 Noland Rd., Lenexa, KS 66215

Phone: 913-485-5520

E-mail: cdouglass@isionline.org

We hope this **STUDENT GUIDEBOOK** will help to answer many of the questions you may have concerning this program. Please read it carefully so you will be prepared when you begin your friendship.

INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been prepared just for you. It is an attempt to answer questions about the Friendship Partner Program and your relationship with your American Family.

It is hard to make statements that will be universally true about all Friendship Partners. They come from a variety of backgrounds, and their lifestyles differ greatly. Your Friendship Partners may be a young couple with small children or no children, or a middle-aged or older couple with grown children and perhaps with grandchildren. It is also possible to have a single adult as a Friendship Partner.

THE FRIENDSHIP PARTNER PROGRAM

WHAT YOUR FRIENDSHIP PARTNER CAN DO FOR YOU...

The American friendship partner experience provides an excellent opportunity to learn about American lifestyles. Through your American friends, you can learn how people interact and what they believe. You can see what types of homes they have and taste their foods. You can improve your English by intensive conversation.

Friendship Partners may also be able to provide you with assistance in finding an apartment, opening a bank account, learning the bus system, or other aspects of settling into life in Kansas City. What the family should NOT help with is:

- 1) Financial difficulties, signing for loans or utilities
- 2) Legal matters
- 3) Immigration matters

The International Students Office has counselors who are trained to help with these problems, as well as other serious difficulties. It is especially important that you never ask your friendship to give or guarantee a loan of money or ask them to sign for your telephone or utilities.

...AND WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR FRIENDSHIP PARTNER

The most important thing you can do is to be yourself, and build a friendship by sharing your thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. Your American Friendship Partner is anxious to get to know you and your culture and to build a genuine friendship! So in addition to returning hospitality, you should look at this experience as a chance to share your culture. Ways to do this:

- 1) Discussing your culture and cultural differences you have noticed
- 2) Discussing your beliefs and thoughts about a variety of subjects
- 3) Discussing current events in your homeland.
- 4) Cooking a meal typical of your homeland or cultural events are obvious ways to help your friendship partners learn about your country
- 5) Sharing photos or slides from home
- 6) Giving your friendship partner maps and postcards of your country
- 7) Explaining national holidays when they occur
- 8) Introducing them to friends from your country
- 9) Playing native music or singing songs from your country
- 10) Looking together through a book about your country

The American Friendship Partner experience is an opportunity for you to give as well as to receive. If you enter it with enthusiasm and a willingness to share, it should be a rewarding and enlightening part of your stay in the USA.

WHERE FAMILIES COME FROM

Friendship Partners come from throughout the local community. Many enter the program because they hear about it from friends who participate. Others have signed up after hearing a presentation made to a local church.

HOW FAMILIES AND STUDENTS ARE MATCHED

On their applications, families may indicate an interest in a particular culture or country. They may also list hobbies, their occupation, children, and other factors may help in matching them with an international student. Students, on their applications, indicate such things as field of study, interest, hobbies, etc. When making a match, these choices are considered. New students will be given priority over those who have lived in the United States or in the local area for a while. When the match has been made, both friendship partner and student will be informed. The friendship partner will attend an orientation meeting and will be instructed to conduct their relationship with their international student along the guidelines of NAFSA (National Association of Foreign Student Advisors).

OVERSIGHT

Once the American friendship partner and the international student meet, the relationship is the responsibility of each of them. The Friendship Partner Coordinators, Eric and Melody Craven, should be contacted by the student or the family if a successful contact has not been made. One of the **most frequent** causes of trouble is a move by the student to a new location. American Friendship Partners will then have great difficulty locating their student. The family “loses” the student after a friendship has been established. **IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU TELL ERIC OR MELODY AS WELL AS YOUR FRIENDSHIP PARTNER IF YOU MOVE OR CHANGE ADDRESSES, PHONE NUMBERS OR E-MAILS.**

COMMITMENT

In signing up with the Friendship Partner Program you are agreeing to be matched with an American couple, family or individual. We are asking you to agree to be committed for the school year at least, and preferably as long as you are studying in Kansas City if the relationship works out well for both of you. We are asking you to commit to meet with your American Friendship Partner at least twice a month. We are hoping that your American friend will keep in contact with you by phone or e-mail throughout the rest of the month. It would be nice if you would also take the initiative to call or write your American friend.

American Friendship Partners become discouraged about the relationship when the international student does not follow through and meet with them. We want this program to be a success for the international students involved, but it is also just as important that it be a success for the Americans that sign up. We have lost some good American Friendship Partners

because of the less than good experience they had with their international student. So we ask you to be a good ambassador from your country and help these Americans have a wonderful experience with an international student.

FIRST CONTACT

Should the student apply for a Friendship Partner before arriving in the country, it is very likely that contact with the Friendship Partner will have been made before arrival. This will allow for the possibility of having your Friendship Partner pick you up at the airport and possibly have you stay overnight in their home, should they have room, or take you to the place that has been arranged for you.

Should contact be made after you arrive, often a social event will be planned in which student and Friendship Partner meet, or the Friendship Partner will receive the name and phone number of the student, and will try to telephone you within the next few days. Sometimes this proves difficult as the student doesn't return to his or her room until late at night, when American custom says it is no longer appropriate to phone. Other times, a message is left with a roommate who fails to pass it on.

When a family/individual makes the first contact with you, they want to set a date to meet. If they invite you to visit them on a date that is impossible for you, explain why you cannot come and suggest a different date. This assures the family that you have a valid reason for refusing their invitation and that you really want to meet them as soon as possible. Many families express discouragement if their invitations are continually refused, for they feel the student is not interested.

FIRST VISIT

When you visit with your family for the first time, we suggest you bring pictures of your family and country to show them. Try to learn the names of everyone in the family. If you cannot understand a spoken name, ask the person to spell it out and practice saying it.

On weekdays, most families are ready to end a time together at approximately 9:30 or 10:00 p.m. On week-ends, you can add an hour or so to this time. After eating a meal with a family, it is polite to visit for at least an hour. At the end of the visit, show your appreciation and talk about future plans.

WHAT NEXT?

Feel free to call the family from time to time to let them know how things are going for you. Most families prefer to be called before 10:00 p.m. **It is also acceptable for you to initiate an invitation!!!** If your nationality group has a special performance in the city or the school has a special event, consider inviting your American family to join you. Cooking dinner for them at your apartment or offering to cook in their home is another excellent way to return the hospitality.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHING AND KEEPING A GOOD RELATIONSHIP

GIFTS

If you desire to give a gift to your Friendship Partner, something that represents your country makes a good initial gift. If there are any children in the family, simple and inexpensive things like national flags and photo postcards would also be appreciated. Expensive gifts are not expected. It is more important that a gift remind them of YOU. For a family birthday or Christmas, small gifts are customary.

A MATTER OF TIME

Customs regarding time vary around the world. In the US you are expected to meet people at the time agreed upon. If you are driving or getting a ride to your American friend's home, and discover that you are going to be more than 10 to 15 minutes late, call and let them know. If you have made arrangements to meet someplace, such as a theater or restaurant, it is very important to be there at the time that was agreed upon.

CHANGING PLANS

If you find you must cancel a meeting, let your friendship partner know as soon as possible and try to arrange another meeting at that time. It is considered very rude in America to make plans and not show up.

DRESS

For normal visits to your American friend's house, casual dress is fine. If they invite you to a party or holiday dinner, you will probably feel more comfortable if you dress just a little more formally. This also applies to cultural events like symphonies and plays. If you are uncertain, ask your family what would be appropriate.

TABLE MANNERS

It is normal for an American family to use meals as a time of conversation. It is all right to use the utensils in the manner to which you are accustomed, even if this differs from the way the family uses them. Hands may be used directly on foods such as pizza, hamburgers, sandwiches, fried chicken and fruit.

If there are any foods you cannot eat, feel free to tell this to your family. If you have any questions about a particular food, ask your family about these as well. Should the meal contain any foods that you can eat but just don't like, you may pass these by or take only a small portion.

Meals are usually served in two ways: 1) buffet-style where dishes are placed on a separate table and you serve yourself before returning to the dining table, or 2) family-style where items served are passed around the table and you serve yourself.

SMOKING

If you smoke, you should ask permission of your host before lighting up a cigarette in their presence. Many Americans DO NOT smoke and DO NOT allow smoking in their home. In some cases, smoke may produce allergic reactions in family members. If your host does not want smoke in the house, you can ask if it is all right to step outside the house for a few minutes to smoke.

HELPING AROUND THE HOUSE

It is usually considered polite to carry your dishes to the kitchen after a meal, unless your hostess makes it obvious she does not want this. Most women will appreciate an offer of help in doing the dishes, but may turn it down. When in doubt, just ask!!

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Your American friendship partner is an excellent source for an exchange of opinions. They will probably be interested in talking about many topics of international interest. In general, Americans do not like to discuss their personal income, the cost of their possessions, their age or their weight.

An important rule to remember is to listen and be open. You should not try to convince your American friend to your way of thinking, as they will not try to force you to see things their way, either. Please feel free to tell them how you feel, but be willing to listen to and understand their ideas, too.

RELIGION

If your Friendship Partner is active in their church, they will probably invite you to attend a service at sometime or other. You do not have to accept this invitation. If you do accept - it can be a great cultural experience. Going does not imply a commitment on your part to join their church. Friendship Partners will not try to exert any religious pressure on you. They may be interested in sharing their ideas. Feel free to share YOUR religion with your family. They will probably enjoy learning about what you believe.

CHILDREN

If your Friendship Partner has children still at home, you have an excellent opportunity to make additional friends. Your "host parents" will appreciate your interest in their children and will enjoy watching you play with them and talk with them. The children will enjoy learning about you and your country.