



**FRIENDSHIP PARTNER PROGRAM  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR  
GUIDEBOOK**

Dear Student/Scholar,

We want to welcome you as a participant in the American Friendship Partner Program. Many students/scholars have found lifelong friendships with Americans through these relationships.

The coordinators between you and your Friendship Partner(s) are: Andrew Bell, [abell@isionline.org](mailto:abell@isionline.org) and Sandeep Thomas, [stomas@isionline.org](mailto:stomas@isionline.org).

You may also contact Carol Douglass, [cdouglass@isionline.org](mailto:cdouglass@isionline.org), in case you have additional questions or problems. Carol is the City Director for International Students, Inc. here in Kansas City.

We hope this **STUDENT/SCHOLAR GUIDEBOOK** will help 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.

American Friendship Partners 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 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. Many students/scholars find that there is a big difference between their family/friend and what they thought American culture is like.

Friendship Partners may 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 Partner to give or guarantee a loan of money or ask them to cosign 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! 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 at your apartment or offering to cook in their home is a great way to share part of your culture with them.
- 5) Sharing photos or slides from home
- 6) Explaining national holidays when they occur
- 8) Introducing them to friends from your country

The 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. Many others have signed up after hearing a presentation made to a local church.

## HOW FAMILIES AND STUDENTS/SCHOLARS ARE MATCHED

On their applications, families may indicate an interest in a specific culture or country. Both Americans and students/scholars will list hobbies, their occupation, children, and other factors that may help in the matching process. We take preferences into consideration as much as possible. The American Friendship Partner will attend an orientation meeting and will be instructed to conduct their relationship with their international student/scholar along the guidelines of NAFSA (Association of International Educators).

## OVERSIGHT

Once the American Friendship Partner and the international student/scholar meet, the relationship is the responsibility of each of them. The Friendship Partner Coordinators, Andrew Bell or Sandeep Thomas should be contacted by the student/scholar or the family if a successful contact has not been made. The most frequent cause for this is when the student/scholar has had a change in location, phone, or email and has failed to let the Friendship Partner or ISI know about these changes. The Friendship Partner then “loses” the student/scholar after a friendship had been established. It is ESSENTIAL that you let the ISI staff, as well as your Friendship Partner, know if you move or your change address, phone number, or email.

## COMMITMENT

The commitment in signing up with the Friendship Partner Program:

1. You agree to be matched with an American couple, family or individual.
2. You agree to be committed for at least the school year.
3. You agree to meet with your American Friendship Partner at least twice a month.
4. We hope you and your American friend(s) will keep in contact by phone, text, e-mail, or social media throughout the rest of the month. *It is always nice for **you** also to take initiative to contact your American friend(s).*

**American Friendship Partners become discouraged when the international student/scholar does not follow through and meet with them.** We want this program to be a success for both the international students/scholars and the Americans. We ask you to be a good ambassador for your country and help these Americans also to have a wonderful experience with an international student/scholar.

## **FIRST CONTACT**

When a student/scholar applies for a Friendship Partner before arriving in the country, contact with the Friendship Partner will often be made before arrival. The Friendship Partner may be the person who meets the student at the airport.

When the student/scholar and American are matched, each will receive the other's contact information. We then ask you all to make contact within a few days.

When a family/individual makes the first contact with you, they will want to set a date to meet. Please respond back when they email, text, IM, or call you. Anything you agree to verbally, please verify with them in writing, by confirming via email, text message, or IM social media. Most communication errors are verbal.

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 really want to meet them. American Friendship Partners express discouragement if they feel the student/scholar is not interested because their invitations are continually turned down. Please do not say you can meet and then not show up or cancel at the last minute.

## **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 9:00 p.m. On weekends, you can add about an hour 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 contact the family from time to time to let them know how things are going for you. Make sure to check with your Friendship Partner about the best time of the day to call them, and let them know the best times to reach you. Most Americans prefer to be called before 9:00 p.m.

**It is also acceptable for you to initiate an invitation!** If your nationality group has a special performance in the city or if the school has a special event, consider inviting your American family/friend to join you. Cooking dinner for them at your apartment or offering to cook in their home is another excellent way to return their hospitality.

# **SUGGESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHING AND KEEPING A GOOD RELATIONSHIP**

## **A MATTER OF TIME**

Customs regarding time vary around the world. Americans are a time-based culture, rather than an event-based culture. They tend to stick to their agreed time schedule on appointments, visits, etc. Do not be offended if an American brings a visit to a close due to a time commitment that they have previously made.

In the U.S., you are expected to meet people at the time agreed upon. If you are driving or getting a ride to your American Friendship Partner's home, and discover that you are going to be more than 10 to 15 minutes late, please call and let them know. That is considered good manners in the U.S. If you have arranged to meet someplace, such as a theater or restaurant, it is very important to be there at the time that was agreed upon.

## **DIRECTNESS & COMMUNICATION**

Americans are probably more direct than you may be comfortable with in your culture, so it is quite OK to say "No" or "I can't." It is also expected that you accept something that you want the first time it is offered. Americans may offer you something only one time. Many cultures are not this direct; but in America, a direct yes or no is expected behavior. It's better to say no, you can't do something than to say you can and then not show up.

If your Friendship Partner(s) invite you to an event that costs money, and they do not make it clear who is paying, just ask them how much it will cost you. It is okay to let them know that you cannot attend an event, but thank them for asking. If the cost is the issue, please let them know that is the reason.

If an American says something that is offensive in your culture, it is probably because it is not offensive in America. Look for opportunities to teach Americans about your culture, what is offensive in your culture, and keep a good sense of humor.

## **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, or to cancel at the last minute.

## **DRESS**

For normal visits to your American friend's house, casual clothing 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, please ask your Friendship Partner what would be appropriate.

## **FOOD & TABLE MANNERS**

Remind your Friendship Partner(s) of any foods you do not eat for health or religious purposes. You don't want to show up at their house and find they have prepared something you can't eat.

It is normal for an American family to use meals as a time of conversation. Americans usually use knives, forks, and spoons. Hands may be used directly on foods such as pizza, hamburgers, sandwiches, fried chicken, and fruit. It is considered rude in America to chew with your mouth open, to make noise while chewing, and to burp.

If you have any questions about a specific food dish, ask them about this as well. If the meal contains 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 three ways: 1) "Buffet-style" where dishes are placed on a separate table and you serve yourself before returning to the dining table. 2) "Family-style" where items served are passed around the table and you serve yourself. 3) "Dutch-style" where the head of the household fills the plates and passes the food to each person at the table. If a food is new to you, or you are not sure you will like it, be adventurous and at least try it!

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!

## **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 MOST DO NOT allow smoking in their home. In some cases, smoke may produce allergic reactions in family members. If you must smoke, please ask if it is all right to step outside the house for a few minutes to smoke.

## **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 never expected. What is more important is that the gift reminds them of YOU.

## **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**

Most Friendship Partners are active in their church. They may invite you to attend a service at some time. 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 or anything else.

Friendship Partners will not try to exert any religious pressure on you. They may be interested in sharing their ideas. We want you to share your ideas and information about your religion with your Friendship Partner(s). They will also want to learn about what you believe.

## **CHILDREN**

If your Friendship Partner has children still at home, you have an excellent opportunity to make additional friends. The children will enjoy learning about you and your country.

## **PETS**

You can put any concerns you have about pets on the Friendship Partner form. Many Americans have pets, usually dogs and/or cats. Many families have dogs and cats in their homes, and others have them outside in fenced yards. Please let them know if you are afraid or allergic to pets and they will put them away while you are visiting.

**WE HOPE YOU WILL HAVE A WONDERFUL TIME AND  
BUILD A GREAT FRIENDSHIP!**