



**INTERNATIONAL
Student Exchange**

Sharing Lives...Sharing Worlds



Student Handbook

Table of Contents

Welcome	3
Top 5 Ways to Be Successful	4
Top 5 Reasons for Program Dismissal	5
Your ISE Network	6
Living with Your Host Family	7-8
Staying Safe	9
Overcoming Challenges	10
Project HELP	11
School Requirements, Graduation, and Convalidation	12
Managing Finances	13
Optional Tours	13
Medical Insurance	14
Social Media Tips	15
Rules and Regulations	16-22
➤ Life with Your Host Family	16
➤ Church and Family Activities	16
➤ Host Family Challenges	17
➤ Disrespectful and Inappropriate Behavior	17
➤ Internet Usage and Cell Phones	18
➤ Making Plans with Friends	18
➤ Life-Changing Activities	19
➤ Substance Abuse	19
➤ School Life	20
➤ Sports and Clubs	20
➤ Operating a Motor Vehicle	21
➤ Visits from Friends and Family	22
➤ Travel	22
Student Orientation Sign-Off	23

The background of the entire page is a photograph of several young women sitting on concrete steps outside a building with large windows. One woman in the foreground is looking at her phone, while others are looking down or at each other. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting daytime.

Top 5 Ways to Have a **Successful Program**

Set yourself up for success in the U.S. by following the tried-and-true steps below:

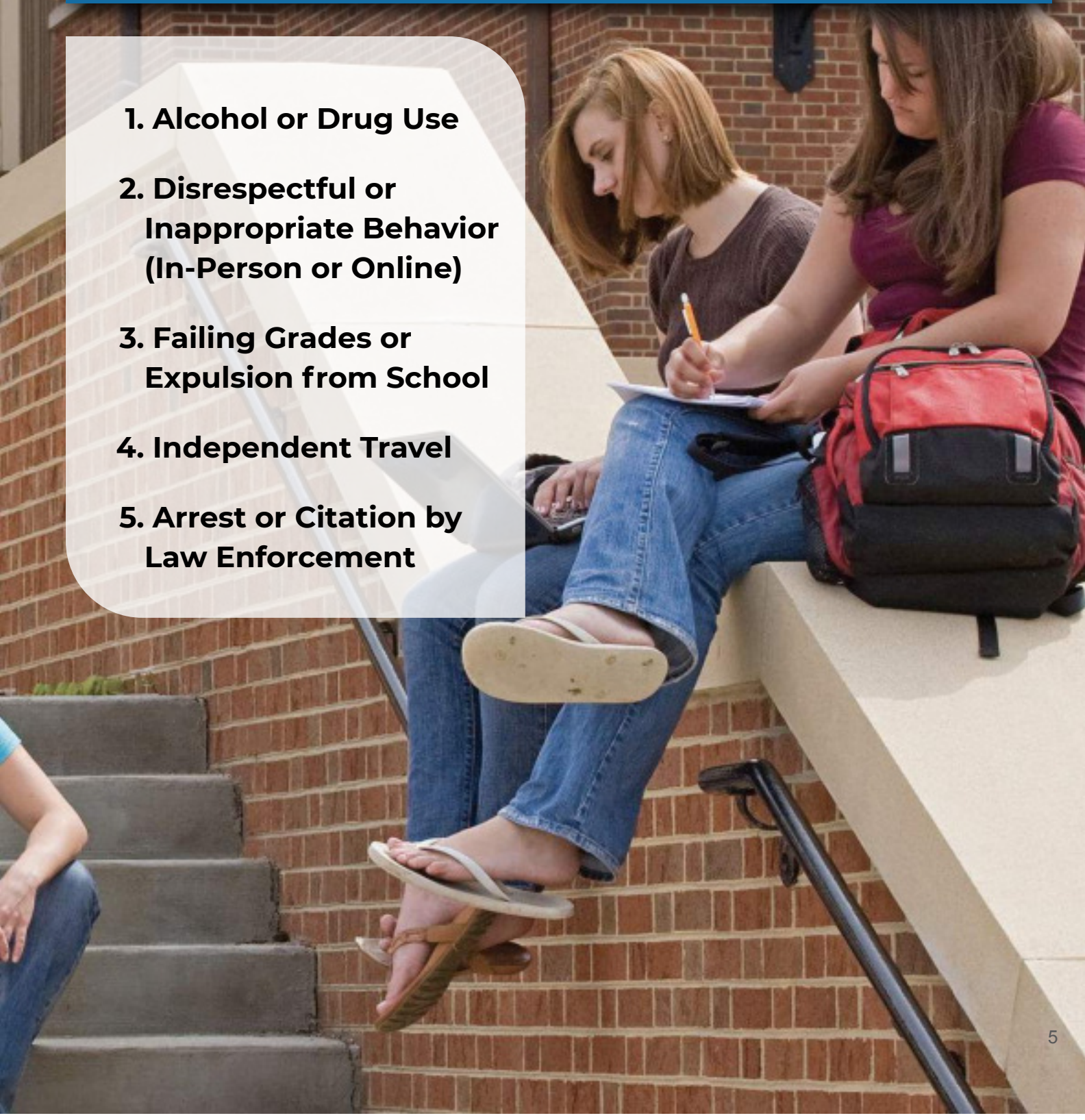
1. **Stay Positive and be Social - A friendly smile goes a long way!**
2. **Be an active and engaged member of your host family.**
3. **Be respectful of your host family, school, and community.**
4. **Get involved in school and community activities - they're a great way to make friends!**
5. **Keep an open mind and try new things!**

You've Made it So Far...

Don't Get Sent Home

Every year, students are dismissed from the program as a direct result of their own actions. The five items below are the most common reasons for early dismissal.

- 1. Alcohol or Drug Use**
- 2. Disrespectful or Inappropriate Behavior (In-Person or Online)**
- 3. Failing Grades or Expulsion from School**
- 4. Independent Travel**
- 5. Arrest or Citation by Law Enforcement**



Your ISE Network

We are excited to have you with us as you prepare to experience authentic American life! While on your program, you will interact with a few key groups. They include:

HOST FAMILIES

Our volunteer host families open their hearts and homes to exchange students in hopes of sharing their own culture and way of life and, in turn, learning about yours. In order to host you, your family will have undergone a background check, home screening, interview, and orientation. Their responsibility is to treat you as a member of the family, not a guest, so you will be expected to participate in family activities, events, and help out around the house.

ISE HEADQUARTERS

Our headquarters is based in Bay Shore, NY. This is where our Program Management Team and Student Services Team operate from. In addition to your Area Representative and Regional Management Team, you will also have additional support from a **Student Services Facilitator** who will review your monthly check-ins, provide updates to your agency, collaborate with your regional management team, and provide guidance when necessary.

REGIONAL MANAGEMENT TEAM

Your Area Representative reports into the Regional Management Team in your area. These individuals are there to oversee your Area Representative, provide additional assistance, as well as maintain a relationship with your host school and ISE headquarters.

AREA REPRESENTATIVES

Each student enrolled in our program is assigned their very own Area Representative. This individual is available to you throughout your program to offer support and guidance. They will contact you at least once a month to see how your exchange is going. They will also visit you in-person to complete an official check-in that will be shared with your home agency and parents.



Living With Your Host Family

Before you know it, you'll be spending a big part of your day with your brand *new* family members with different traditions, beliefs, and preferences than yours. This is both exciting and a little scary — but a positive attitude can go a long way. After all, your new family is just as excited and nervous as you are! Below are some ways to enjoy a successful program with your host family.

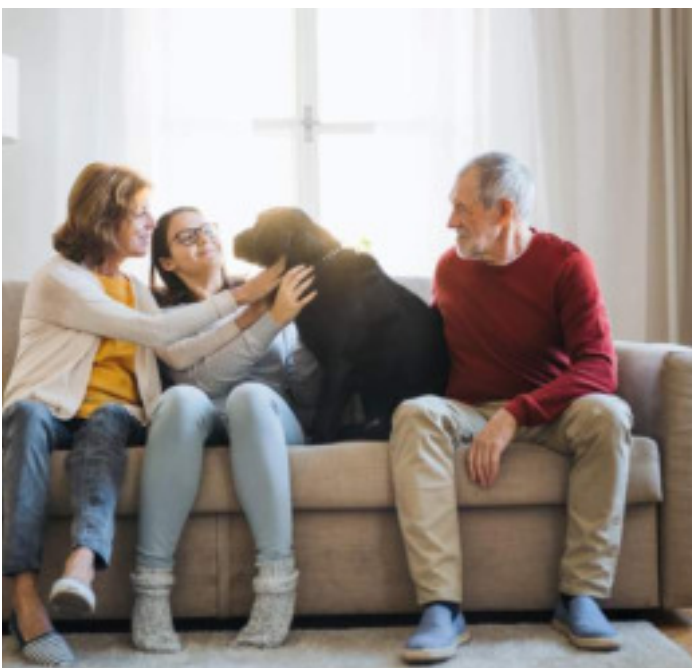
Open Your Mind and Heart

In order to set a good foundation with your new host family, take some time to talk about what activities are most important to them. Maybe they always have dinner together as a family, or always go to church on Sundays. Maybe they avoid using their cell phones or tablets in the living room or prefer to spend at least one day a week together at home. Whatever your new family's beliefs and traditions, it's important that you not only understand and respect these differences but openly embrace them, too.



Ask Questions - Lots of Them!

Cultural exchange is all about learning — and sometimes, learning means asking questions even when you feel silly doing so. It might feel easier to sit back quietly and do as you're told, but asking questions helps your host parents spot and fix any misunderstanding or confusion. You aren't expected to understand everything right away, and your host family is there to help. This is especially true for things like rules, curfews, and chores. It's much easier to ask questions about why a particular rule is put in place, versus accidentally breaking a rule later on. Also be mindful of the difference between asking and telling!



Living With Your Host Family

Use these tips to get off on the right foot with your host family!

Speak Up if You're Uncomfortable

Just like you are expected to learn about and respect the beliefs and values of your host family, they are expected to respect yours. While sometimes it's up to you to try new things, there are some instances where something might be too far outside of your comfort zone. Use *your words*. Your host family won't know what you're thinking if you don't tell them, and it's up to you to communicate with them openly about your thoughts, feelings, and needs.



Keep Your Promises and Always Tell the Truth.

Your host family's number one concern is keeping you safe, healthy and happy during your time abroad. To do that, they need to know where you're going and who you're spending time with. Maintaining honest and open communication — and always doing what you say you'll do — will help your host family trust you as well as keep you safe. Remember: trust is a difficult thing to earn and a very easy thing to lose. By always doing what you say you will do, you can show your host family that you are responsible and mature enough to do things on your own!

Staying Safe

Your health and safety is our top priority. For this reason, ISE conducts a thorough screening of all host families and households to ensure that you are being placed in a positive, sanitary environment. Maintaining a comfortable, safe environment throughout your stay is a team effort. You should feel comfortable speaking to your representative about any situation that makes you feel uneasy, which can include:

- Unsafe or unsanitary living conditions
- Being offered drugs or alcohol
- Sexual misconduct
- Theft
- Mental health struggles/depression



Practice Personal Safety	Prevent Sexual Abuse
<p>Never give your name, address, phone number, or any pictures of yourself to anyone on the Internet.</p> <p>Always have a safe way home and make sure if you go anywhere with friends that you leave together. Call your host family if you ever need a safe way home.</p> <p>Practice situational awareness. You have every right to exit a situation that is making you feel uncomfortable.</p>	<p>Sexual contact between a high school student and any adult is never appropriate. It is illegal for any adult to engage in sexual activity with a minor.</p> <p>You control your body. <i>It is always OK to say NO to anyone.</i> If anyone intimidates, threatens, or tries to coerce you into any unwanted sexual activity, contact ISE headquarters immediately at 1-800-766-4656. We are here to help you.</p>
Prepare for Emergencies	Trust Your Instincts
<p>Always know where your personal documents are, such as passports, insurance cards, debit cards, and Visa documents.</p> <p>Familiarize yourself with important phone numbers and addresses, such as your host family and medical care providers.</p>	<p>Trust your feelings in all situations. If you are feeling uncomfortable or uneasy about a person, place, or situation, remove yourself as soon as possible.</p> <p>If you ever require assistance at any point of your program, contact your Area Rep or ISE headquarters.</p>

Overcoming Challenges

Our goal is for every student on our program to be successful. For this purpose, we've developed a plan for helping students overcome program challenges, such as failing grades, host family conflict, etc. *You are in control of the way your exchange program turns out.* Below is an outline of our problem resolution plan.



Problem Identification

Our first course of action will be to identify the issue so that you and your host family can better understand each others' point of view on the issue. To do so, your Area Rep will meet with you and/or your host family to discuss the issue(s) at hand. A Problem Identification Form will be completed and sent to ISE headquarters and your agency will be notified. The form includes a description of the issues from both you and your host family's perspective.

Problem Resolution

If the problem persists, your Area Rep will conduct another meeting that will be documented with a Problem Resolution form. Again, this form will be sent to ISE headquarters and your International Agent will be informed. This form will clearly define the issues to be resolved along with what you and your host family will do to improve the situation. If an issue has reached this level it means that other attempts to improve the situation have failed and it is time for you to take things more seriously to avoid risking your program.

Probation

If the issue persists, the Probation sets strong guidelines for improving behavior. Failure to make the changes outlined in the probation may result in termination from the program. The probation letter is written by your facilitator at ISE Headquarters and is signed by you and your area representative to ensure that everyone understands the situation and what is expected. It will also be sent to your international agent.



NOTE: Student Services reserves the right to determine the appropriate course of action for addressing issues. Certain behavior may warrant skipping directly to a Problem Resolution, Probation, or even Termination.

Project HELP

One of our goals is to help the teenagers of today grow into the global leaders of tomorrow. We believe that instilling a dedication to service through our Project HELP initiative is an important part of this process. **Per Project HELP, you are required to complete a minimum of 5 hours of community service.**

You can find a cause close to your heart through friends, host family members, teachers, etc. or you can work with your Area Representative to find volunteer opportunities in your area. Some project ideas include park cleanups, food drives, visiting nursing homes, and volunteering at animal shelters.

➡ WHY VOLUNTEER?

It's Fun!

It Opens You Up to New Experiences and Perspectives

It Helps You Make New Friends and Connections

It Gives You the Ability to Support and Give Back to Others

It Gives You a Sense of Accomplishment

It Brings About a Sense of Gratitude



School Requirements & Graduation

Your host school will determine whether graduation is possible, therefore, **students are not guaranteed a diploma** at the end of their program. It's important to keep in mind that you must take English and U.S. History as a part of the program, regardless of whether or not graduation is possible. **You must also maintain a C average** in your classes per our program policy. If you are struggling in a subject, please speak with your Area Representative as soon as possible. If you plan on changing your class schedule during the school year, please inform your Area Representative first.



Convalidation of Grades

Many countries require a process called convalidation in order for your American high school grades to count when you return home. The process varies depending on the state in which you are placed and is very bureaucratic, so everything must be done right to complete it. **It is your responsibility as the student to complete this process and ensure your credits transfer.** You should check with your agent for more information regarding convalidation.

ISE has partnered with a company that can manage your convalidation for you for a fee. Please speak with your representative to find out whether or not convalidation will be necessary and, if so, how to take advantage of the service.

For more information, please visit iseusa.org/convalidation

Managing Your Finances

Per Department of State policy, **you must have at least \$300 a month in personal spending money** for things like clothing, school supplies, recreation, school lunches, etc.

It's important to make sure you manage your finances effectively. First, determine where you will keep your personal money. In most cases, your host family can help you open a free checking account at a local bank. Some students choose to use prepaid debit cards instead. Research your options and determine what works best for you, and don't hesitate to talk to your Area Representative for advice. Whatever you decide, always be sure that only you have access to your funds. You should never lend or borrow money from your host family or friends. You should also avoid traveling with or storing large sums of cash.



Optional Tours

You have the option to sign up for supplemental excursions through our partnering travel agency. These trips are chaperoned by ISE representatives and take place in exciting locations such as New York City, Hawaii, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and more! If you'd like to participate in one of these trips, please contact your representative for dates and pricing. **More information is available at iseusa.org/trips.**



Medical Insurance

You will arrive in the US with medical insurance, however keep in mind that your program health insurance is not comprehensive coverage. Pre-existing conditions, immunizations, routine health checkups, and preventative care is not covered. Pre-approval for certain treatment may also be necessary.

Pre-existing conditions are defined as any injury, sickness, disease, or other condition that the student had symptoms of or had been seen by a doctor within 36 months of the start of the program. Here are some examples of conditions that are not covered:

- Dermatology visits for acne or other pre-existing skin conditions
- Any pre-existing condition like thyroid, diabetes, vision issues
- Physical therapy
- Dental/Orthodontic Treatment

Your insurance card will be emailed to you by your provider and should be accessible at all times in case of emergency. Be sure to speak with your Area Representative if you have trouble accessing your cards and/or policy information.

For more info, visit iseusa.org/j1-insurance

Avoid the Emergency Room

You should avoid going to the Emergency Room unless a situation is serious or life-threatening. **Services rendered in the emergency room are extremely expensive in the US**, so it's important to determine whether or not it is appropriate to go there for treatment.



Urgent Care is a Good Alternative

The alternative to the ER is an Urgent Care Center, sometimes referred to as a walk-in clinic or convenient care. Urgent Care is for same-day treatment, not for serious or life-threatening conditions. Urgent Care offices usually have extended hours and are open weekends and some holidays. No appointment is necessary.

Your Parents are Responsible for Medical Bills

Your natural parents should be listed on medical paperwork and are responsible for all medical bills incurred during your program. If a provider refuses to treat you unless someone in the US signs as a guarantor, it may be necessary for the host family or Area Representative to sign but your natural family is ultimately responsible for all bills.

Social Media Tips

While technology can help ease homesickness and culture shock when used correctly, overuse of social media when studying abroad can actually have negative effects on your exchange experience. Here are some ideas to help curb the negative impact of social media use and enhance your exchange experience overall.

Make a Schedule for Chatting with Friends and Family Back Home

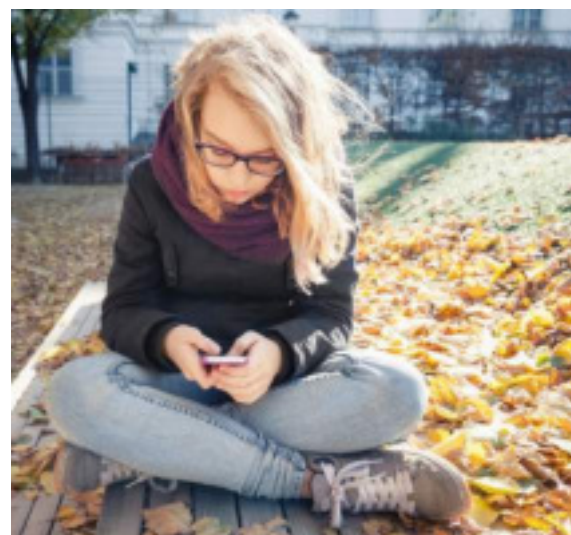
With connecting to friends and family back home as easy as opening up an app on your phone, it's hard to stay away. That's why it's especially important to make a schedule for interacting with people back home during exchange, especially in the first few weeks when you're adjusting to your new lifestyle. Have a conversation with your family about how often they should connect. It's a good idea to schedule these chats on a particular day of the week that is usually free of other commitments. **Remember: culture shock is temporary, and if you stay present and engaged, you'll be back to yourself in no time!**

Start a Blog

Friends and family back home are naturally interested in the fun activities and adventures you go on during your cultural exchange program. It's also completely natural to want to post pictures, videos, and updates on your experiences on social media. That said, social media sites allow for an almost instant response from your friends and family back home — which makes it especially easy to get caught up in a commenting spiral. **Having a blog or website where you can post pictures, stories, and updates on your experiences abroad is a great way to keep friends and family in the loop — without getting constant notifications to your phone.**

Plan a Regular “Digital-Detox” Day

Plenty of young people swear by the benefits of a “digital detox” day every few weeks or months. By simply putting away the phone, tablet, and computer for 24 or 48 hours, you give yourself time to enjoy the people and environment around you. **Use this time to pursue a new interest or hobby, get to know your host family better, spend time with friends, volunteer in the community, etc.**



Rules & Regulations

In order to enjoy a successful program, it's important to follow the rules and regulations. **Failure to do so may place your program at risk.**

Life with Your Host Family

- Obey all house rules, including those regarding curfews, phone, internet usage, and scheduling. Begin your program with a discussion with your host family what their rules and expectations are.
- You will be expected to do chores such as cleaning your room and helping out around the house. Don't wait to be asked - volunteer to help with household responsibilities.
- Your host family may be very different from your family back home and life with them may be different from what you are accustomed to. Do not argue with your host family over chores or rules. If you have a problem that can't be solved by having a respectful discussion, contact your Area Rep.
- Always ask permission to go out with friends. Make sure your host parents are informed of your whereabouts.
- Be respectful of everyone's privacy and property

Church and Family Activities

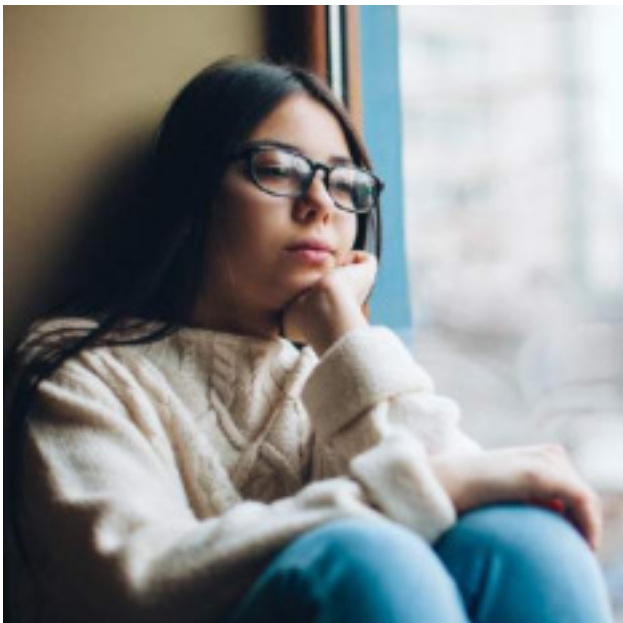
- We encourage all students to attend church services and activities with their host families. Though it may be different than what you are accustomed to, faith is an important aspect in the lives of many American families.
- It is important to always be respectful.
- Youth group activities are often geared toward socialization rather than worship and are great places to make friends.



Rules & Regulations

Host Family Challenges

- You are expected to remain with the family that you are placed with.
- It is your obligation to adjust to the family.
- If you are having trouble, your Area Rep is the first person you should contact. Your Area Rep is trained to help resolve problems between students and host families. Talking about issues with your natural family can often create a more stressful situation since they are so far away.
- It's inappropriate to discuss your host family with other members of the community.
- It is our policy to make every effort to work through problems before considering a relocation. If a change in host family is deemed necessary, you will be relocated in your current community or to a new location at the discretion of ISE.
- You may be responsible for any related costs associated with the move.
- Failure to adjust to the program under reasonable circumstances may be grounds for dismissal from the program.



Disrespectful and Inappropriate Behavior

- Disrespectful or threatening comments made in person or electronically can be grounds for program dismissal.
- Any physical altercations with host family members or peers will be taken very seriously and can lead to dismissal.

Rules & Regulations

Internet Usage and Cell Phones

- Improper use of the Internet is a serious violation. This includes, but is not limited to, downloading or viewing of pornographic material, improper or offensive information, and violent content.
- “Sexting”, or sending nude photos of yourself or anyone else via text or e-mail is against program regulations and is illegal in many states.
- Modifying or tampering with your host family or school computer equipment in any way is unacceptable. This includes downloading programs, music, photos, changing settings, or deleting files. Students will be responsible for any damages and costs incurred by improper use.



Making Plans with Friends

- Ask what the expectations of your host family are before you have friends over or make plans
- Let your host family know when and where you are going at all times.
- Do not assume that people will take you where you want to go; ask first.
- Inform your host family if your plans change.



Rules & Regulations

Life-Changing Activities

- You may NOT engage in intimate sexual activity while on the ISE program.
- Tattoos, body piercing, changing religions, marriage, or any “life-changing” actions are prohibited.



Substance Use

- All local, state, and federal laws apply. It is illegal for minors to purchase or consume alcohol in the U.S.
- If you are caught using alcohol or illegal substances by the police, your host family, or other authorities you will be sent home. This not only includes the use of illegal drugs, but also the abuse of prescription drugs and tobacco.



Rules & Regulations

School Life

- Follow all school rules and regulations as they are outlined in the school handbook.
- Go to school every day that school is in session. This is a U.S. government law and a visa requirement. You can be suspended or expelled from school for missing classes without permission.
- Tardiness to class is not allowed and will be addressed formally by the ISE program.
- You must treat teachers, officials, and other students with respect.
- ISE may dismiss you from the program for poor academic performance. You must maintain an overall “C” average in your academic classes.
- Exchange students are required to take U.S. History and English. DO NOT change classes without speaking to your Area Rep. ISE is not responsible for your convalidation process. This information should be provided by your agency in your home country.



Sports and Clubs

- ISE does not promise that you will be able to participate in sports, groups, or clubs. Tryouts, deadlines, etc. may impact your participation.
- You are encouraged to try new things. U.S. schools generally offer varied sport and club opportunities.
- You are responsible for all team/club fees and costs.

Rules & Regulations

Operating a Motor Vehicle

- You may only operate a vehicle during a school-sponsored driver's education course. You may not operate a vehicle under any other circumstance.
- You must have your host family's permission to participate in Driver's Education. Do not pressure your host family if their answer is no.
- You are responsible for paying all costs related to driver's education participation.
- In most states, you will not be able to obtain a license because you will be unable to accrue the number of driving hours necessary without driving the host family vehicle. Even if a license is obtained, you may not operate a motor vehicle while on the program.



Rules & Regulations

Visits from Friends and Family

- Visits from natural family or friends are strongly discouraged. While it's normal to miss your family, visits are highly disruptive to your program.
- Prior permission from your host family and ISE headquarters must be obtained for any visits from family/friends.
- You are not allowed to travel with or to natural family members or friends during the program.
- You may only travel independently after your program has ended. You may travel with your natural family after your program has ended.

Travel

- Traveling home is not allowed during the program. Special permission may be granted through the NY office in the case of the death of an immediate family member.
- You may not travel out of the local area without an approved representative or adult host family member. You may travel on day trips to nearby cities and attractions (malls, recreational areas, etc.) with your host family's permission.
- If you will be traveling out of the country with your host family or for an approved trip, you will need to send your original DS-2019 form to the NY office along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. This form will then be returned to you with a signature that is required for re-entry to the US.



Student Orientation Sign-Off

Below you'll find the official rules of the ISE program that you signed at your orientation.

Failure to abide by these rules may result in disciplinary action and/or early termination from the program.

- The use/possession of alcohol, tobacco products, or illicit drugs is forbidden.
- Program participants are expected to maintain an overall C average in core academic courses and attend classes as scheduled. Any school absence must be approved by your host family and school. Student are also expected to know and abide by all school rules and regulations.
- Independent travel is not permitted. Overnight travel is only allowed with a host parent, school approved chaperone, church group, exchange program representative, or a tour guide approved by the exchange program.
- Obscene, indecent, violent, or disorderly conduct (in-person or digitally) while on the program is grounds for dismissal. In the case of early dismissal, program fees will not be reimbursed.
- Host families determine the rules and expectations for living within their household. Program participants are expected to take part in family activities and follow rules with regards to respect, chores, curfews, social activities, and cell phone/internet use.
- Program participants are required to have their own spending money while on the program to pay for their phone bill and other personal expenses, including specific dietary needs. Students are not to lend or borrow money from the host family.
- American friendships are encouraged. Sexual relationships and/or intimate relationships that detract from the program's focus are not allowed.
- Visits from family and friends from your home country are not recommended. Special permission from ISE headquarters must be granted in advance.
- Program participants are required to participate in 5 hours of community service during their program.
- The program participant may not drive any motorized vehicle. A student is allowed to register for a school-sponsored driver education class. If a license is obtained through this program, the license must be immediately given to the exchange organization's local representative. It will be returned to the student on the day of departure for home.
- The handling of firearms by students on the ISE program is strictly forbidden. Students may not partake in any event/function involving firearms whether it be but not limited to sport, hobby or educational purposes.
- Program participants are required to depart five days from the last day of school.
- In the case of early dismissal, program fees will not be reimbursed.



**INTERNATIONAL
Student Exchange**



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Important Contacts

Keep track of important program contacts such as your ISE Area Representative, ISE Regional Management Team, and host family members below.

Relationship	Name	Phone Number / Email
<input type="checkbox"/> ISE Support <input type="checkbox"/> Host Family <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
<input type="checkbox"/> ISE Support <input type="checkbox"/> Host Family <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
<input type="checkbox"/> ISE Support <input type="checkbox"/> Host Family <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
<input type="checkbox"/> ISE Support <input type="checkbox"/> Host Family <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
<input type="checkbox"/> ISE Support <input type="checkbox"/> Host Family <input type="checkbox"/> Other		

**36 Park Ave., Bay Shore, NY
11706
800.766.4656 | www.iseusa.org**