



# Outbound Student Handbook 2025-2026





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# Part 1: The Rotary Youth Exchange Program

## Letter from an Exchange Student Megan Webber

When I was applying for exchange, I felt drawn to Europe. I wanted to go to Italy or France or Germany and reconnect with the roots of my ancestors. When I was offered New Zealand, it wasn't what I had imagined, but I was thrilled. To be offered a placement at all, let alone one in a beautiful part of the world that most people never get to visit, was a dream come true. I was disappointed when New Zealand Rotary rejected me and it didn't work out, so when I was offered Argentina instead, I was all the more thrilled! I felt like I was a lost puppy and the Argentinians rescued me. I have always been grateful for that.

The people I met there were kinder to me than anybody could ever be. They took care of me. They didn't have to, but they did. When I was sad, they went out of their way to make me feel better. I will never forget that. Amid all of my feelings about being far away from home and the only non-native Spanish-speaker in my school, I witnessed my host sister Lucía prepare for her own exchange. We were almost trading spots. While I stayed behind in Tres Arroyos, she would be moving to Pagosa Springs, Colorado. Looking back on it, the thing I really took away from that experience was the power of a positive attitude.

Lucía (Lula, as we called her) was sad to leave her home, but she had a good attitude and loved her exchange. I remember feeling jealous for a brief time that Lula got to come to Colorado. She got to go skiing and hiking while I had to stay in Argentina. But in a few weeks, I forgot all about that and fell in love with my life in Argentina. I wouldn't have traded it for the world, not even for Colorado.

Lula and I weren't the only ones who learned a lesson about positive thinking. My friend Thomas had an unlucky placement — he was living in Cañon City, Colorado with a host family that pretty much ignored him. It would've made anybody miserable, but he always had a good attitude, and that's what made him so much fun to be around and be friends with. Caleb Thompson, our Outbound from New Castle in 2022, survived an earthquake in Turkey, but instead of coming home and escaping, he kept a good attitude, remembered to be grateful for what he had, and he stayed behind to lend a helping hand to his new community when they needed it.

That song "My Favorite Things" from "The Sound of Music" is more than just a nursery rhyme — it's a lesson in mental health. What things make you happy? Staring up at the stars, a cute dog, dancing barefoot in the grass, getting a new book for Christmas, etc. What things would you miss about your host country if you had to leave today? I miss empanadas, the blue hue of the sky, the way everyone kisses you on the cheek when you walk in a room as if you're important even though they only just met you that day, etc. What things would you miss in life if you had to give it all up?

If you're not grateful for what you have, then you probably will find issues with whatever you end up with. Being picky is a privilege.

Wherever you ended up is where you're meant to be. Everything happens for a reason.



If you have a positive attitude, you will have a good experience. If you have a negative attitude, you will be disappointed.

And that's the secret to a successful exchange.

Megan Webber  
Carbondale – Argentina, 2015-16

## **What is Exchange?**

*Anonymous*

Exchange is change. Rapid, brutal, beautiful, hurtful, colorful, amazing, unexpected, overwhelming and most of all constant change. Change in lifestyle, country, language, friends, parents, houses, school, simply everything. Exchange is realizing that everything they told you beforehand is wrong, but also right in a way. Exchange is going from thinking you know who you are to having no idea who you are anymore to being someone new. But not entirely new. You are still the person you were before but you jumped into that ice cold lake. You know how it feels to be on your own, away from home, with no one you really know, and you find out that you can actually do it.

Exchange is thinking. All the time. About everything. Thinking about those strange costumes, the strange food, the strange language. About why you're here and not back home. About how it's going to be once you come back home. How that girl is going to react when you see her again. About who's hanging out where this weekend. At first who's inviting you at all. And in the end where you're supposed to go, when you're invited to ten different things. About how everybody at home is doing. About how stupid this whole time-zone thing is. Not only because of home, but also because the TV ads for shows keep confusing you. Thinking about what's right and what's wrong. About how stupid or rude you just were to someone without meaning to be. About the point of all this. About the sense of life. About who you want to be, what you want to do. And about when that English essay is due, even though your grades don't count. About whether you should go home after school, or hang out at someone's place until midnight. Someone you didn't even know a few months ago. And about what the hell that guy just said.

Exchange is people. Those incredibly strange people, who look at you like you're an alien. Those people who are too afraid to talk to you. And those people who actually talk to you. Those people who know your name, even though you have never met them. Those people who tell you who to stay away from. Those people who talk about you behind your back, those people who make fun of your country. All those people, who aren't worth your giving a damn. Those people you ignore. And those people who invite you to their homes. Who keep you sane. Who become your friends.

Exchange is music. New music, weird music, cool music, music you will remember all your life as the soundtrack of your exchange. Music that will make you cry because all those lyrics express exactly how you feel, so far away. Music that will make you feel like you could take on the whole world. And it is music you make. With the most amazing musicians you've ever met. And it is sight reading a thousand pages just to be part of the school band.

Exchange is uncomfortable. It's feeling out of place, like a fifth wheel. It's talking to people you don't like. It's trying to be nice all the time. It's cold, freezing cold. It's homesickness, it's awkward silence and it's feeling guilty because you didn't talk to someone at home. Or feeling guilty because



you missed something because you were talking on Skype. Exchange is great. It's feeling the connection between you and your host parents grow. It's knowing in which cupboard the peanut butter is. It's meeting people from all over the world. It's having a place to stay in almost every country of the world. It's cooking food from your home country and not messing up. It's seeing beautiful landscapes that you never knew existed.

Exchange is exchange students. The most amazing people in the whole wide world. Those people from everywhere who know exactly how you feel and those people who become your absolute best friends even though you only see most of them 3 or 4 times during your year. The people who take almost an hour to say their final goodbyes to each other. Those people with the jackets full of pins, all over the world.

Exchange is falling in love with this amazing, wild, beautiful country. And with your home country.

Exchange is frustrating. Things you can't do, things you don't understand. Things you say, that mean the exact opposite of what you meant to say. Or even worse.

Exchange is unbelievable. Exchange is not a year in your life. It's a life in one year. Exchange is nothing like you expected it to be, and everything you wanted it to be. Exchange is the best year of your life so far. Without a doubt. And it's also the worst. Without a doubt. Exchange is something you will never forget, something that will always be a part of you. It is something no one back at home will ever truly understand. Exchange is growing up, realizing that everybody is the same, no matter where they're from. That there are great people and douche bags everywhere. And that it only depends on you how good or bad your day is going to be. Or the whole year. And it is realizing that you can be on your own, that you are an independent person. Finally. And it's trying to explain that to your parents. Exchange is dancing in the rain for no reason, crying without a reason, laughing at the same time. It's a turmoil of every emotion possible. Exchange is everything. And exchange is something you can't understand unless you've been through it!

## **What is Rotary?**

### **The History of Rotary**

Rotary was born on February 23, 1905 in Chicago, Illinois, the world's first and most international service club. The founder of Rotary was attorney Paul P. Harris (1868-1947), who gathered with three others to discuss his idea of a group of businessmen from different professions getting together periodically to become better acquainted. They decided to limit membership to one representative of each profession and to rotate the meeting site among each member's place of business, to acquaint each other with their various vocations and to promote business. The rotation of meeting places is the source of the name "Rotary".

When clubs were formed in Canada and Great Britain, in 1912, Rotary became an international organization. Since 1905, the ideas of Paul Harris and his friends have become ideals which have been accepted by people of practically all nationalities, and of many political and religious beliefs. Today there are Rotary Clubs in 200 countries. There are more than 33,000 Rotary clubs, with a membership of over 1.2 million men and women.

### **Rotary Motto and Themes**

Rotary International has adopted as its motto, "*Service Above Self*". Additionally, each year, the Rotary International President coins a theme for that Rotary year. The 2023-24 theme is "Create hope in the world."



## **The Rotary Foundation**

The Rotary Foundation is a philanthropic trust promoting further understanding and friendly relations between peoples of different nations. The Foundation sponsors the largest scholarship programs in the world and is supported purely by voluntary contributions from Rotary Clubs and Rotarians.

The mission of The Rotary Foundation is to enable Rotarians to advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through the improvement of health, the support of education, and the alleviation of poverty.

The Rotary Foundation helps fund our humanitarian activities, from local service projects to global initiatives. Your club or district can apply for grants from the Foundation to invest in projects and provide scholarships. The Foundation also leads the charge on worldwide Rotary campaigns such as [eradicating polio](#) and [promoting peace](#). Rotarians and friends of Rotary support the Foundation's work through voluntary [contributions](#).

## **Rotary at the Local Level -- The Rotary Club**

The "personality" of each Rotary club is a reflection of the community it serves and the membership of that club. Rotary clubs meet weekly throughout the year; some for a breakfast meeting, others during lunch or dinner. Some Rotary club meetings are quiet and "serious", staying to a tight schedule so the members can return to work on time, while other club meetings are less formal and structured.

Exchange students often find that the Rotary club **hosting** them will be very different from the Rotary club **sponsoring** them, and both will be very different from other Rotary clubs they may have the opportunity to visit during their exchange year. But Rotarians around the world all share the common philosophy for Service to others, and as an exchange student, they are there to help provide a successful exchange experience.

As with most organizations, Rotary clubs are led by officers who are elected by the membership for one-year terms, beginning on July 1. The officers include the Club President, Secretary, Treasurer, Vice-President and/or President-Elect, and Directors. Rotary clubs participating in the Youth Exchange Program generally appoint a Youth Exchange Officer, or YEO, to oversee that program. Another member of the host Rotary club will be designated as the exchange student's Club Counselor. This Rotarian serves as the primary liaison between the Rotary club, the exchange student and the host families.



## **The Rotary International 4-Way Test**

**Of the things we think, say or do:**

1. IS IT THE **TRUTH**?
2. IS IT **FAIR** TO ALL CONCERNED?
3. WILL IT BUILD **GOODWILL & BETTER FRIENDSHIPS**?
4. WILL IT BE **BENEFICIAL** TO ALL CONCERNED?

If you keep this test in mind when you are unsure how to act or what to say, it will help you decide what to do. It can be applied to pretty much anything in life — before, during and after exchange.

## **Mountain and Plains District 5470 Rotary Youth Exchange**

Mountain & Plains Rotary Youth Exchange (MPRYE) consists of 57 Rotary clubs that cover the Southern 2/3 of Colorado. We are your SPONSOR district. In 2023-24 we will exchange with Rotary Districts in Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Colombia, Czech Republic/Slovakia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Romania, Spain. Other districts will be one-way exchanges, meaning that our district will receive an inbound from those countries but we will not send them an outbound student. Through a volunteer committee of about 35 Rotarians, we typically send and receive 26-30 Rotary exchange students each year. Learn more at [www.mountainandplainsrye.com](http://www.mountainandplainsrye.com), and be sure to like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/mprye](https://www.facebook.com/mprye).

## **Overview of Your Exchange Year**

Your exchange year will be 10-12 months long. It could begin as early as July and will end **after June 1** the following year. Our exchange students depart for their host country between late July and early September, and return home the following June or July. You will be given departure instructions by your host country. Many have a specific date you need to arrive for language camp or orientation.

Although the youth exchange programs and rules for each district are similar, the host district and club guidelines take precedence over those of the sponsoring district. The host district, host club and host family are responsible for each student's cultural, spiritual and physical well-being and may set their own rules and guidelines, which may be more or less restrictive than those we apply to the students we host. You should become familiar with those rules and guidelines before, or immediately upon, your arrival in your host country. More on contacting your host district, club and family will come later in this handbook.

## **Objectives of the Academic Year Program**

The most powerful force in the promotion of international understanding and peace is exposure to different cultures. The world becomes a smaller, friendlier place when we learn that all people – regardless of nationality – desire the same basic things: a safe, comfortable environment that allows for a rich and satisfying life for themselves and for their children. Youth exchange provides thousands of young people with the opportunity to meet people from other lands and to experience their cultures, thus planting the seeds for a lifetime of international understanding.

- Communities all over the world have much to gain from the continued success of the youth exchange program.
- Students learn firsthand about the challenges and accomplishments of people in other countries.
- Young people mature as individuals as their concept of the world grows.
- Host clubs, families, and their communities enjoy extended, friendly contact with someone from a different culture.



- Exchange students return home with a broader view of the world and a deeper understanding of themselves.
- Young adults assume leadership roles that are shaped, in part, by what they learned during their exchange experiences.

## **4 IMPORTANT POINTS**

1. All Rotary Exchange Students **MUST** attend school during the exchange
2. Correspond with your assigned school prior to departure
3. Return with documentation of attendance/completed classes
4. You must work with your home school for class/credit transfers

## **Review of RYE Program Terms**

- RYE – Rotary Youth Exchange
- MPRYE – Mountain & Plains Rotary Youth Exchange (that’s us!)
- Rotary YEP – Rotary Youth Exchange Program
- Outbound – Student going to a foreign country (you, now)
- Inbound – Student here from another country (you, in your host country, after you arrive)
- Rebound – Student who has returned from their year abroad (you, here, in 2 years) Often called ROTEX, as in Rotary Ex-Exchange Students (RYE Alumni)
- YEO – Youth Exchange Officer

### **In Colorado:**

- Sponsor District 5470, Mountain & Plains RYE
- Sponsor District Chair – John Stroud, who leads the activities for all Rotarian volunteers and oversees Outbound, Inbound, and Rebound students
- Outbound Coordinator – Megan Webber, who coordinates the higher-level aspects of the MPRYE program for Colorado students going abroad
- **Country Coordinators** – Rotarians specifically assigned to work with a group of our exchange partners and the outbound/inbound students affiliated with each. These are the folks who will be in the trenches with you, closely working with you on YOUR exchange.
- Sponsor Club – your Colorado Club that is affording you this opportunity
- Sponsor YEO – Colorado Rotarian who helped you navigate the application process
- Your “natural” parents, friends, etc.
- Language Coordinator – Cynthia Blancke, who is helping to facilitate language acquisition before the exchange begins.

### **ABROAD:**

- Host District – where you’re going
- Host District Chair – Kristi Redlinger’s counterpart
- Host Club – the specific Rotary Club that will host you, coordinate your host families, and pay your stipend, where you will be an Inbound student
- Host Club YEO – will help you structure your year, plan activities, inform you about Rotary events, ensure you have transportation and your stipend
- Host Club Counselor – Rotarian who will be your advocate and advisor
- Host family – you are not just a visitor, you are a part of the family



# Part 2: Things to Know Before You Go

## *What Happens Next?*

Now that you have been accepted into the exchange program by your sponsor district, your application goes on ahead of you to begin planning your year abroad.

1. **District 5470 Country Coordinators** - Your application is thoroughly reviewed to make certain that it is complete. If any documents are missing, your Country Coordinator will be in touch with you to get those turned in immediately. Deadlines can affect your continuation in the program. Once your application is considered complete, your file is sent to your host country for acceptance.
2. **Host District** - Your application is reviewed overseas and a host club will be matched with you.
3. **Host Club Youth Exchange Officer** - Your application is reviewed, host families are offered the opportunity to get a “first look” at who you are, and local schools are considered. Several ‘local’ signatures are required to show that you have been ‘invited’ to live in your host city. This step in the process takes the longest. There are several formalities that must be handled, and your patience is going to be needed while you wait for news about your assignment. Once all the signatures and invitations are obtained, your acceptance papers will be sent to us.
4. **Host District Inbound Coordinator or Chair** - Your completed invitations are reviewed for accuracy and your “welcome package” is prepared. Every district does their own “welcome package”. Some give you only basic information about the name of your city and what date you should arrive. Others will send you detailed information about your host district. Whatever that means, your assembled “welcome package” is returned overseas at this point.
5. **District 5470 Country Coordinators** - Your file is updated and the original documents are mailed to you.
6. **YOU** will receive your welcome package. Departure instructions will be included with this package. If you haven’t already made contact with your hosts, NOW is the time to do this. You should also be corresponding with It’s Your World Travel, who will make an appointment with the consulate (if needed), and get your travel plans in order. From this point forward you will be guided by your HOST country to finalize your plans.

### **Important Note:**

It might be as early as March or as late as July before you hear something. **Your patience is likely to be tested in this process.** Not all cultures operate in the same time-conscious manner as ours. While you are waiting you have plenty of work to do, in order to be prepared for going overseas for an entire year.

## **Academic Credit for Your Year of Study Abroad**

As soon as you have been selected for exchange, talk to your high school academic counselor. Although you will be studying in a high school overseas, Rotary has no control or involvement with your graduation requirements.

You might consider taking required courses in advance of your departure, or make special arrangements for summer school after your return. You should ask about the possibility of at least earning foreign language credits during your time away, perhaps with a test upon your return to document your level of foreign language skills.

Even though most schools will not guarantee credits ahead of time, you should ask for any agreement they do make with you IN WRITING. You should plan to bring back a copy of your high school transcripts from the time



you were out of the country. If available, obtain a copy of your student handbook or ask your school in your host country for course descriptions.

The more information you bring home with you, the better your chances are of being granted school credits for your studies. It is important to note that acceptable passing grades are going to be necessary for you to make a good case. Your high school at home is the FINAL authority on this decision.

## Learning Your Target Language

You will all be hosted in a country where the native language is not English. **YOU must make a conscientious, disciplined effort to learn your host country's language as quickly as possible.** Speaking and understanding the language is the key to acceptance in any country, even in countries where English is a commonly-learned "foreign language".

You have between six and eight months between country placement and departure to study the language of your host country. You have ample time to acquire functional fluency in the language of your host country. **It would be blatantly disrespectful to arrive in a country with no solid grasp of the language.** It reflects poorly on you, your country and culture, and Rotary District 5470. Many of our exchange partners are expecting that after three or four months in their country, exchange students will be able to speak, read and write with fluency and have demonstrated considerable effort to acquire the language. Lack of effort and proficiency is a reason to send you home.

Some of you have been placed in a country that speaks a language that you can study in your school. Unless you have been involved in French Immersion, your school language studies will not provide you the level of proficiency that you will need before you depart. You will need to study above and beyond your high school language classes. Our expectation is that you will make time in your busy schedules and make language study a priority. You will be amazed at how much you can learn setting aside thirty disciplined minutes every day.

We offer the following suggestions to help you acquire the keys that will open many doors in your wonderful host culture.

1. **Enroll in a class where you have made an academic or financial investment:** nothing like a little commitment or consequences to make you show up and do the work!
2. **Listen /watch radio and TV in your host language.**
3. **Watch movies in your host language.** Watch the first time with subtitles and the second and third time with the subtitles turned off. Netflix (netflix.com) has a HUGE selection of foreign language films. Even if you only subscribe between now and when you go, it will be worth every penny. Movies are a great window into a culture. Get your ears used to the patterns, pace and rhythms of your host country language.
4. **Download (legally) popular and folk music from your host country.** Get the lyrics online to your favorites and translate them. What are they actually singing about?
5. **Go to the library and check out children's books in your host country language.** They have simple vocabulary and lots of pictures. Children's music and nursery rhymes are helpful too.
6. **At the library look for periodicals like People and Time in your host language.**
7. **If you already know the language somewhat, use a dictionary in your host country language.** You won't believe what a difference that will make in your vocabulary. Be sure you take one with you.
8. **Buy a "501 Verbs" book** - learn 3 verbs a day between now and when you leave.
9. **Learn two feeling words a day** (happy, confused, irritated, relaxed, hungry, sad, optimistic, excited, etc.) It is when you can talk about what you are feeling that you can begin to deepen your relationships with people.
10. **Become a "Grammar Geek".** You really do sound like a three-year-old when you can only speak in the present tense. Grammar gives language its structure and shape. Grammar is the word for the rules that



people follow when they use a language. Clear and nuanced communication is all about knowing the rules. Pay attention to grammar in your own language. What is similar in your new language? What is different? Concentrate on the aspects of grammar that you find most difficult. Focus for a week at a time on that aspect. You will nail it in a week of concentrated effort. Read in your new language. Read out loud. Write in your new language. Your brain absorbs new information differently when you read, write and speak.

11. **Find some native or fluent speakers** in your community that you can converse with; perhaps you can trade language lessons if they are still learning English.
12. **Label objects in your home in your new language.** Write on flash cards or sticky notes and stick them to objects around the house, like chairs, tables, appliances and drawers.
13. **Use a language-learning app.** Apps like DuoLingo will help you learn the basics of a new language by spending at least 20 minutes a day studying words and phrases.
14. **Do everything that Cynthia Blancke tells you to do.** Our Language Coordinator will follow up with each of you to keep track of your progress on iTalkie. Work with her to practice and see how you are improving. Trust us, she knows what she's talking about.

## **Finances**

### Family Costs - Included in Program Fee

- Round trip unrestricted airline ticket (must be purchased through District 5470 travel agent)
- Sponsor District-Directed costs for health insurance and training
- Rotary blazer, pins, Rotary business cards, flags
- Orientation sessions and materials
- Visa residency permit
- Mandatory language camp fees
- Partial reimbursement for required travel to consulate
- Online language program (iTalkie)

### Family Costs – Not Included in Program Fee

- Sufficient spending money for personal expenses, clothing & entertainment
- Refundable emergency fund as directed by your host country (usually \$300-\$500 U.S.)
- Passport
- Optional tours and activities
- Phone/computer access

\*The amount of spending money you will need and have available will likely depend on your circumstances and families you stay with. Two general guidelines should always be kept in mind:

- Be willing and able to “pay your own way” for travel and entertainment with host family and friends. Don't expect to be treated as a guest at all times and understand when it is appropriate to offer to pay for meals, entertainment tickets, etc. when offered such opportunities.
- Do not spend money freely or lavishly when those around you do not have the resources to do likewise. Don't be labeled as “the spoiled kid” who throws money around.

### Rotary

- Room and board with pre-screened host families in host country (host club)
- Any required expenses for high school education in your host country (host club)
- Monthly allowance equivalent to \$75 minimum (or equivalent “buying power”) in U.S. currency (host club)

\*Your sponsor club may offer additional support at their discretion. This varies by district and by individual club policy.



## Health & Medical Issues

### Vaccinations/Immunizations

Most countries require you to carry proof of your vaccination record with your essential papers. Advice on which vaccines you should have can be obtained from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Travel Pages on the internet. They have different sections that address particular regions around the world, and lists of the countries that are included in each region. Each travel page summary suggests which vaccinations to boost, which new vaccinations to have and which medications to carry. Some vaccines must be taken several weeks before departure. Consult with your physician SOON. [www.cdc.gov/travel/destinat.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinat.htm)

The CDC is responsible for pointing out ALL the potential risks, however remote, and they also offer sound advice for avoiding risks. The most frequently reported illness is ‘traveler’s diarrhea’ and there is a special section on ‘Food and Water’ that discusses this.

### Medical Records

You should ask your physician for a new prescription for medications you must take that can be filled in your host country. If you wear glasses, a copy of your lens prescription, or even a spare set of glasses, can help avoid a big problem in the event your glasses are lost or broken.

If you will turn 18 during your exchange year be sure to sign a medical release at your doctor’s office prior to your departure.

### Make a Plan for Emergencies

Prior to departure, discuss family wishes in the event that there is an emergency during your year abroad – such as illness or death in the family. You should try to anticipate your wishes and those of your family if you are confronted with a situation in which your early return home is a consideration. There have been occasions when a student has had to be told by phone of a death of a friend or family member, though they are not necessarily expected to come home. Most often, when a student is called home for a family emergency, it is not an option to return to your host country. Any emergency that causes you to leave should be very serious.

If you will need a year’s supply of a certain medication (such as birth control), you will need to talk to your doctor and will probably need special permission from a pharmacy. DO NOT WAIT until the night before you fly out to get these prescriptions. It will cause lots of stress.

It is common for exchange students to catch a cold or a bug within the first few weeks in their new country. We recommend taking a small amount of American cold medicine with you before you go. Your host families may not have the medicine you are used to taking and may not understand what you need. Instead of making a doctor’s appointment for a cold, it may help to have some medicine already on hand.

## Passport and Visa

Immediately upon acceptance into the program, you should apply for a passport, if you don’t already have one. If you do have a valid passport, the expiration date must be no earlier than six months after you expect to return home from your year abroad (January, 2026). A “raised-seal” birth certificate is needed to apply for a passport.

The requirements for a Visa (permission granted by the entry country for a non-citizen to enter) vary by country, and our travel agency and Rotary contacts will be able to guide you through the process of securing a Visa.

## Cell Phone

Contact your cell phone company to learn what you might be able to do to allow your cell phone to work in your host country. Ask if the phone can be “unlocked” so you can attach a new plan while you’re abroad. You might learn that you’re better off purchasing a new phone after you arrive in your host country. Make sure you have a way to communicate with your USA family as well as your host family during all of your travels.



You can also rely on WiFi until you purchase a local SIM card in your host country. SIM cards are usually fairly cheap and you can add plans for however much service you'll need to the card.

## **Money**

You and your parents should check with your bank about setting up an international credit card or ATM debit card, which will provide you with an easy and inexpensive way to deposit funds here and withdraw funds in your host country without incurring interest charges or high transfer fees. Having this card will mean you will not need to travel with a large amount of cash. We recommend that you have BOTH a debit card for ATM use AND a credit card for emergencies. When talking to your bank, BE SURE TO ASK if the card is readily accepted in your host country. If not, try a different card provider. Take extra precautions to protect credit cards and cash from theft, especially when traveling, and make sure you and your parents know what to do in the event you lose these items.

Become familiar with the currency of your host country and understand the “exchange rate” for conversion to your home currency. The buying power of your dollar will vary, and costs for needed items may be significantly different than what you consider as “the norm.” Before you leave, you and your parents should establish a budget for your spending money, and you should follow that budget carefully so that you don't run out of money before the end of your exchange year. Sign up for online banking so you and your parents can monitor your accounts.

Working to earn income is prohibited while overseas, so do what you can do now to earn funds.

## **Travel Reservations**

Once your departure date and arrival airport are known, work with our travel agency It's Your World Travel to arrange the required round-trip airfare. You must have “open-return” round-trip airfare as a requirement of the exchange program. Although airline rules and regulations differ, most airlines will issue the return flight tickets for a specific return date and allow one change with no or a low-cost change fee. Inform your Sponsor District and those in your host country (Host Club YEO, Host Family, etc.) of your travel itinerary as soon as the information is known. Safeguard your tickets both before and after departure, since they are just like money and will be very difficult to replace if lost. Some host clubs may ask to hold your tickets as a safeguard upon your arrival. If you keep your return tickets, make sure you know where they are. You will be required to select a return date by mid-February during your exchange year. Changes to tickets after that February date will incur a change fee to be paid by you. All information related to travel will be communicated via your It's Your World Travel account: [www.iywt.com](http://www.iywt.com).

## **Luggage**

Luggage selection and packing requires good planning. Most international airlines have strict rules for checked and carry-on luggage. Find out from our travel agent the specific requirements. You may be traveling during your exchange year, very possibly by train or bus, and smaller, lightweight luggage may be more appropriate for those shorter trips.

## **Pack Selectively**

Don't overload! Don't run out and go shopping for new clothes prior to your departure either. In most countries, you will want to make some clothing purchases to meet the climate or the styles of the area. Your style and size will likely change quickly when you reach your destination.

## **The Rotary “Uniform” – Your Youth Exchange Blazer**

Your Rotary Blazer will identify you as a Rotary Exchange Student and draw attention to you in a positive way. It is always suitable when the occasion calls for “dressing up”. But don't pack your Blazer; wear it when you depart for your host country. Many students report that by wearing their blazer and youth exchange pins while traveling, their passage through customs and immigration is made easier, officials are happy to offer help, and you become instantly “recognizable” by your hosts on arrival.



## **Banners, Business Cards, Pins**

You should ask your Sponsor Rotary Club for several Club Banners. They can be presented to the host country Rotary clubs that host you for various functions. You will usually receive one of their banners in return, to bring back to your sponsor club.

MPRYE will provide you with pins to exchange with or give to people you meet during your exchange year. You will likely want to purchase more on your own. Area politicians, your local chamber of commerce, and state/provincial tourism bureaus are good resources to ask for supplies – or purchase at reduced rates.

MPRYE will provide Business Cards with your picture and contact information to give to people you meet.

## **Attending Rotary Meetings**

Depending on your host country assignment, students are generally invited to attend some Rotary meetings with their local club. You will be asked to make AT LEAST one presentation to your host club. Your club counselor or YEO should provide you with information about the day, time and location of club meetings.

Your host club may also expect you to participate in special events. As a young ambassador, you become an important part of these activities as well.

During the year, all students will be required to attend some District meetings in your host country. If you do not understand what is expected for attendance at Rotary events, ask your host Youth Exchange Officer and/or your District Chair.

You will also be involved in 2 Orientation events before you go. This is a great time and place to gather contact information for Rotarians at the District level — the District Chair, Outbound Coordinator, Country Coordinators, rebounds and, of course, other Outbounds! Make a Facebook or WhatsApp group chat so you can communicate and share stories with each other while abroad. You are all in this together!

## **Prepare To Be an Ambassador**

During your exchange year, you will meet many people who only know your home country through the lens of a movie or TV camera. As an exchange student, one of your roles is to help people change these misconceptions. To do that, you must understand our country, our culture, our government and our politics.

Become as knowledgeable as you can on these topics before you begin your exchange year. Locate a good roadmap that you can take with you to show friends and host families where you live. You will also need a map of your country, to show people where you live compared to well-known cities. Understand travel distances -- in hours -- from your home to other places, and relate that to distances between cities in your host country.

You also need to become familiar with your host country **before** you arrive there. Read -- and re-read good material about your new home. Make a special note of cultural attributes. Consider how they differ from your culture, and why. Use your resources -- the internet, school and public libraries, magazines and newspapers, etc. -- to learn about current events, history, government and politics, etc. for your host country, and especially for the region you will be living in. Purchase two maps showing the cities and topography of your host country, preferably in detail -- one to take with you and the other to leave at home -- so your family can locate places you mention in your letters.

## **Prepare a Presentation**

Most host Rotary clubs and some high schools in your host country will ask you to speak to them. You should have a fully-prepared 15-minute talk about you, your hometown, your region, and your sponsor Rotary club. You



should bring a powerpoint presentation or slides or photos – and have them ready before departure. You may be presenting this in another language later in your exchange. It might also be wise to have more than one talk prepared. You may be asked back for a second or third talk to your host Rotary club.

## **Tips on Preparing Your Presentation**

### **Topics to Include**

Outline your life in the USA/Colorado/your hometown

Personal – family, pets, house

School – subjects, sports, extra-curricular, structure of your day

Leisure – hobbies, interests, vacation destinations

City highlights – interesting features of your community

Famous people

What do visitors want to do when they come to your area? (Go there before you leave!)

Cultural or economic significance – something your area is known for

Manufacturing or industry

Arts, architecture, sports

Cuisine

Diversity

Your sponsoring Rotary Club

Composition

Number of members

Men, women

How long have they been involved in Rotary Youth Exchange?

Service projects/Fundraisers

If you don't know go and interview someone from the club prior to your departure

### **Organize Your Thoughts**

List topics you want to include.

Ask yourself “What would I want to know about?”

Outline a few items from each topic

Choose items you know well

Choose items you like.

Write a note card about each topic

Just the main points – not a word for word speech

Speak from your experiences

Stories enrich the understanding

Best speeches convey emotion or passion about your subject

### **Practice**

Talk about how you felt when you found out which country you were going to.

Immediate reaction of you and your family

Who did you tell and why?

What research did you do next?

What was your biggest fear?

### **Prepare Your Visuals**

Consider creating a short (10 minutes) and long (20-25 minutes) version in PowerPoint

[www.mountainandplainsrye.com](http://www.mountainandplainsrye.com) [www.facebook.com/mprye](http://www.facebook.com/mprye)



Include photos for interest  
Take photos at your local Rotary Club, or ask your YEO for help  
Depict lifestyle, events that can be described

Verify that similar technology exists at your destination  
Videos are nice – but be careful of the technology  
Video formats are not standard worldwide  
Send a video or DVD to your host family to see if they can read it  
DON'T let the video tell your story

### **Get Your Audience Involved**

Best speakers are memorable because the audience participated and had fun  
Teach a phrase or a song  
Prepare a favorite food or snack  
Ask for questions  
It's OK if you don't know the answer

### **Have Fun**

Try something different  
Wear a costume  
Play native music or your favorite song  
Teach your favorite dance  
Smile – Make it natural!  
Use humor

*\*Consult with your host club's exchange officer for guidance on what is acceptable in their culture*

### **Other Speaking Details**

Breathe  
Let go of the podium  
DO speak into the microphone  
Speak slowly. Enunciate distinctly  
Get assistance with translation if you do not speak the language well.  
Speak so the person in the back of the room can hear you  
Look around the room at different people

### **Practice BEFORE you go**

Give your presentation to your HOME Rotary Club before you leave – or to a smaller group of Rotarians or other exchange students  
Ask for ways to improve your presentation  
Be willing and ready to accept advice

### **Your Impact**

Youth Exchange presentations enhance Rotary Clubs and Rotarians  
Your Message promotes World Peace  
Your Message encourages the club to continue to support exchange  
Your expression of Thanks is remembered



You should also put together a good quality photo album to show host families and other people you visit, such as for dinner and weekend outings. Photo albums are good conversation starters, and your selections should be well thought out, keeping in mind what might be of interest to people in your host country.



CLUB INFORMATION: MY SPONSORING ROTARY CLUB

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

FOUNDED \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER OF MEMBERS \_\_\_\_\_

MEN \_\_\_\_\_

WOMEN \_\_\_\_\_

MEETS (TIME & PLACE) \_\_\_\_\_

PRESIDENT \_\_\_\_\_

PRESIDENT-ELECT \_\_\_\_\_

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES:

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES:

ROTARY FOUNDATION ACTIVITIES:

OTHER INTERESTING FACTS:

### **Make Contact with Host Club and Host Family**

As soon as you are notified of the name of the Rotary club that will host you, you should write to the host club counselor and first host family, giving them information about you, including your interests. Include a photo of yourself, especially if you have changed your appearance at all from your application photo. You should use this letter as an opportunity to ask about school, school clothing/uniforms, climate, activities, etc. Every opportunity should be taken to exchange correspondence with the host family before departing, as this helps tremendously in the initial settling-in period in a new environment.

### **Bring Gifts!**

You should be thinking about gift items for host families and people who will be your host for weekends and other special visits. The gifts need not be expensive, but should be thoughtful and something distinctly American, preferably local to your community.

#### **Gift Suggestions**

- Stamps, stamp pins
- Refrigerator Magnets
- T-shirts, all kinds
- Note Paper with regional art scenes, etc.
- Picture postcards
- Craft show items
- Tapes or CDs of music (make your own)
- Flags
- key chains, buttons, pins
- Jacket patches – national, regional, local



- Books or magazines
- Christmas stockings and ornaments
- Calendars with cultural scenes
- Commemorative spoons, plates, etc.
- Small children's toys/USA Beanie Babies
- Bumper stickers
- Posters/USA Map
- Coins
- Peanut butter, candy with peanut butter, root beer barrels, stuff for s'mores, chocolate chip cookie/brownie mix
- A cookbook with common foods (select one with lots of pictures and also bring cheap measuring cups and spoons as not everyone measures ingredients the way we do)
- Advertising and commercial freebies (from local industry, chamber of commerce)
- Items from locally focused industries
- Items from local tourist locations
- Sports logo items
- A print of local scenery, painting from a local artist or a wall hanging depicting something from your area
- Cheap \$15-\$20 MP3 player loaded with your favorite music

And especially ...

- Banners from your sponsoring Rotary Club

You should have a special present to give to each of your host families soon after you arrive. Also remember birthdays and holiday presents for all the members of your host family. You don't necessarily need to take all such gifts with you when you leave home (and often will need time to learn what will make a great gift for members of your host family), and parents back home can help with this. These gifts need not be expensive, but should be selected and given with warm thoughtfulness.

## **Your Departure**

**First, make sure everyone has your complete itinerary.** Your parents, host parents, and host YEO should be provided with your complete travel plan as soon as you have it. Be sure it contains flight numbers, times, airlines and airports. Make sure your hosts acknowledge that someone will be there to pick you up.

**Wear your Rotary Blazer while traveling!** You will likely be recognized by other Rotary exchange students and airline employees. Pay attention to strict luggage rules, and comply with all security requirements. Be sure to keep WITH YOU your passport with Visa and any documents related to your entrance in your host country, plus \$100 - \$200 in your new currency. You will very likely have connecting flights that will require you to navigate the airport on your own. Make sure you have a cell phone or international calling card that will work IN EVERY country on your flight path. Understand that you will have paperwork to complete for Customs upon your arrival, and you will have to be cleared by Customs officials before you are able to greet your host family.

## **Preparing for TRAVEL STRESS**

You have made the preparations, studied the culture and language, attended the orientations, packed your bags and the day of departure is upon you. Your emotions are peaking and the questions in the back of your mind are forcing themselves out and giving you that queasy feeling in the pit of your stomach. What is it? The experts call it **"travel stress"**.

**Start preparing a day or two before you leave** and on the plane and in the car on the way to your host family's home.



- Go to bed earlier if you will be traveling east and later if traveling west to begin your body's internal clock adjustments.
- Avoid alcohol, sleeping pills, and tranquilizers prior to departure. (You should be avoiding alcohol anyway!)
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing and shoes. To help prevent your feet from swelling, get up and walk around the plane occasionally. Massage your limbs, neck and shoulder muscles.
- Avoid stimulants such as tea, coffee and other caffeine products before and during the flight and do not smoke. (You should also be avoiding smoking anyway!)
- Drink plenty of non-carbonated beverages such as water or juice on the flight to keep yourself well-hydrated. This helps overcome the drying effect and the poor quality of the re-circulated air.
  - Practice deep breathing exercises to get added oxygen. Breathe in through your nose to expand your diaphragm, hold it for 3 seconds, and exhale through your mouth. Repeat 10-15 times every hour or so.



# Part 3: The First Few Weeks

## The Things No One Told Me

*Lori Ruhlman, mother of an outbound and host mother of an inbound*

When we were preparing to send our daughter Jessica to Venezuela as a Rotary Exchange Student, I knew she would have a life-altering and amazing year. I looked forward to hosting Zuhey from Costa Rica. I knew that both girls would learn a new language and assimilate into a whole new culture. I knew that the world would become a smaller, friendlier place for all of us. Even as Jessica exchanged those first letters and emails with her family in Venezuela, and as I exchanged first emails with Zuhey in Costa Rica, the two formerly “foreign” countries started to become real to me. I felt bonded to a mother in Venezuela, who was accepting my daughter into her home. And I felt bonded to a mother in Costa Rica because I knew how her heart must feel as she prepared to let her daughter go. I was determined to greet and care for her daughter with the love and compassion with which I hoped someone would greet my own daughter.

I knew the experience of living in another country would test and sharpen the skills of the girls, and would turn them into more flexible, adventurous, insightful human beings. I knew that the Rotary Program would facilitate all of that.

But there were things I didn’t know, that I would like to try to put into words now.

There is something in the structure of Rotary that could change the world, if only it could be applied to everyday life. I am not just talking about the international component, although that is obviously the focus.

Rotary Exchange Students have the great opportunity to go live in another country ... to become immersed in another culture for a year of their lives. But there is more. They are given something else, something I couldn’t have imagined the power of, something very few people ever experience. It transcends place to the extent that it doesn’t matter to which country they travel. I witnessed this from two perspectives: my daughter in Venezuela and then Argentina, and Zuhey Lara Rojas in our home in the USA. And I saw it happen to many other students whom we came to know this year.

For one year of their lives, these students are given the gift of unconditional acceptance and love. Everyone they meet is eager to know them, from the families who open their doors, to the Rotarians who welcome them at the airport with a hug. The network of other Rotary students they meet from around the world also greet them with open arms. There are people in their schools, etc., who may not share this intense interest, of course. But anyone connected with Rotary in any way is greeting them with a common sense of purpose, a desire to get to know them and to understand them, a goal to share cultures, ideas and experiences.

This is reflected in the language that is used. Students go live with a “family.” They have a host mom and dad, along with brothers and sisters. The Rotarians are extended family; adults who have taken the responsibility of preparing students from their district to go abroad and adults on the other end who have volunteered to care about the new young people in their lives.

Where else will these students go in life and find people who are so eager to meet them, so determined to make their year a good one? The message is: we are here to know you. We welcome you. You are on our center stage.

They are greeted by families who say “you are our daughter.” How powerful is that? What if we met all strangers with the premise of “you are our daughter, our son, our brother?” What if we greeted strangers from another country with hugs and kisses as they walked off the airplane and into our lives? The exchange program takes away the disinterest or suspicion involved in meeting someone new and begins with the idea that “we will get to know each other and we will love each other.”



What makes Rotary different from other exchange programs is the broad network. Students grow to love not only the people in their host family, but other students from all over the world. Imagine having a year of your life to meet other students who are sharing the experience of living in another country. They meet with an immediate common bond; a shared goal of getting to know each other. Again, the premise is, “I want to know you and to love you. I want to have fun with you.” When else in life do people meet in this same way?

I heard stories about this from my daughter. Students from other countries told her they had thought they didn’t like Americans until they got to know her. In a bus with 20 other people from all over the world, stereotypes go out the window. Students share their histories and their stories; they share laughter, adventure and lack of sleep. They learn to know each other to the core. I witnessed this over and over this year with the Rotary Exchange Students in our district. One of the most heartbreaking and heartwarming images was the final embrace of Zuhey from Costa Rica and Deer from Thailand. Two girls from totally different cultures who became the best of friends. Two girls who never would have met someone from the other side of the world if it were not for Rotary. When they met, they couldn’t even speak the same language. By the time they had to say goodbye, they were completing each others’ sentences.

The other thing no one told me:

A year ago, I grieved as I said goodbye to my daughter. I knew I was lucky to have Zuhey here, living in Jessica’s bedroom. I knew it would help me to have another girl to care about. What I didn’t totally anticipate was the grief at the other end. Now my daughter is home, and my heart is aching for Zuhey. She was not a “replacement” for Jessica. She was a wonderful, insightful and loving young woman who became our daughter.

How else would this ever have happened? Rotary sent us a gift. Rotary introduced us to a shy girl who spoke little English and said, “This is your daughter.” We said goodbye to a confident young woman fluent in English. And she was – and will always be – our daughter.

## **Your Host Families**

**Rotary Youth Exchange is an entirely volunteer program.** Families volunteer to host a Rotary exchange student – and must be approved by the Host Club. All are hosting because they want to. Families often make special arrangements to have you in their home. A host brother or sister may have temporarily given up their room or agreed to share their space.

Clubs do not provide financial support to host families.

**You should expect to be treated as a family member.** Honor the household rules and make your best effort to adapt to their lifestyle and show respect. Be flexible and understanding. If you do not understand what is expected of you, don’t be afraid to ask. You are not a guest. For the moment this is *your* family.

The first few weeks may be difficult, depending on how different things are. You may be homesick. This is normal and we do expect our host parents to be as understanding as possible. But, **most of the problems that arise in the youth exchange program are due to the student being unwilling to adapt to their new environment.** It is important that you understand how to adapt.

The most important person in your exchange will probably be your first host mom. Seek her advice and listen to what she has to say. What you learn from your first host family will be the foundation for your relationship with others. She is also the one that will be asked the most questions about you.

Most host clubs will have two or three families planned for your stay. There are 3 reasons for this:

1. To give you an opportunity to experience several different family lifestyles
2. To give more than one family the opportunity to know you
3. To spread the cost of supporting you



If you have developed a good bond, it is sometimes difficult to change host families. Every family is different and one may be more “comfortable” for you than others. Try not to make comparisons and take time to get to know your second and third families.

Be respectful when you speak about your families to others. Gossip travels quickly and it is easy to cause hurt feelings. Try to appreciate whatever your host families do for you.

## **Recognizing & Dealing with Travel Stress**

You have landed in your host country, met your family, traveled to your “home”, unpacked in your “new” bedroom and you may not feel just right. You may feel some anxiety, you’re tired and may assume it’s jet lag. What is it? The experts call it “**travel stress**”.

If you recognize the symptoms, you can deal with them. Jet lag is real and can take a toll on you. Your biological clock has been upset. Day is night and night is day. Your body hormones may also be out of balance.

Emotionally, whether you realize it or not, (and you probably don’t) you are under a lot of stress. You have left your family, friends and familiar surroundings behind you. You may have been apprehensive about the flight, your personal safety, will you be met, will you be accepted, can you cope with the new culture, etc. Some of us are secure, some insecure, with most of us in the middle. You may be worried about being able to eat the food, learn the language, adjust to no car, make new friends, attend a new school, how you will get around with no car, adjust to different social and economic standards, accept more restrictive discipline, where is the mall.

Not knowing what to expect next may throw you off balance. All in all, you have a suitcase full of emotionally stressful issues.

Jet lag and stress can sometimes result in physical ailments or discomfort. Indicators include feelings of anxiety, insecurity and fear. You may have trouble sleeping, or you may be extraordinarily tired and sleep for hours. Women often have irregular menstrual cycles. Upset stomach, lightheadedness, bowel upsets, headache, crying jags or a combination of these are not uncommon. You may find yourself continually thinking of home and homesickness sets in. It’s all natural and to be expected. The question is how are you going to deal with this unwanted baggage that seems to have accompanied you? Sure, you remember those Rotarians telling you about travel stress, but you only half listened and thought they were exaggerating for effect. But now you’re thinking, maybe they were right. And so now that you have it, that “Travel Stress” thing, let’s deal with it.

### **For the Ladies in the Room:**

Travel stress can contribute to irregular menstrual cycles. You may experience irregular bleeding, pain, discomfort, or overall emotional lows. This is VERY normal for human females. The best thing you can do is be prepared. Make sure you know where to go to get pads/tampons/etc. Take some with you from home for the first month or so, but after that you should feel comfortable asking your host mother, host sisters or friends for support. Lean on your girls when you need to.

### **Dealing with it**

First, recognize it for what it is and remind yourself that 10,000 other exchange students are probably in the same boat. This is why it is so important for you to build relationships with your fellow outbounds NOW. Remember, it is temporary and can be overcome.

Once you’ve arrived, establish a regimen and daily schedule for your new environment. It’s helpful to exercise, whether you’ve done so at home or not. Walk, jog or run around your new neighborhood. Learning all the new things, especially language, is tiring. A nap after school and time to relax is often helpful. Take some time to read,



write in your journal or listen to music or take some time to get to know your host family. Consciously establish a daily and weekly routine to keep yourself busy, to give your days order and to help you relax.

The time it takes to adjust to your new surroundings will vary with every individual. The initial adjustment may take some people a few days while others will be up and ready to go in 24-48 hours. Realize that it takes time. Once the initial excitement wears off, you may experience a recurrence. But you can take control and get back on an even keel. Try not to dwell on your situation. Avoid worrying or putting unrealistic expectations on yourself such as, "I will beat this feeling by tomorrow." This can cause things to get worse. Let nature take its course.

## **Summary**

Travel stress is real and can be successfully dealt with. Travel stress includes jet lag, emotional and physical manifestations. Support is available, within yourself, your host family, Rotary Club members, and sponsoring district Country Coordinator.

## **First Night Questionnaire**

Rotary has developed a First Night Questionnaire which should be used every time you move to a new family to help you to avoid common misunderstandings. Do your best to start off on the right foot!

### **Settling in with your host family**

Remember that you must adjust to become a member of each host family - and not just expect to be its house guest. Soon after you arrive in each of your new homes, you should discuss the matters outlined below to establish a relaxed relationship upon which to build each period of your exchange. Don't forget to translate these questions into your host language and know how to ask them.

#### **BECOMING PART OF THE FAMILY**

What do I call you?

Would you please call me \_\_\_\_\_

#### **WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES AROUND THE HOME?**

##### ***In the kitchen-***

Are there set times for meals?

What can I do to assist at mealtime:

set the table?

clear the table?

help wash the dishes?

put the dishes away?

empty the garbage?

Between meals, may I help myself to food and drink, or should I ask first?

##### ***In the bathroom-***

What is the order of usage in the morning?

How long may I be in the bathroom?

Do I buy my own shampoo, soap, toothpaste or use what is there?

Where may I keep my toiletries?

May I bathe or shower every day?

Morning or night, or both?

**How should I dispose of waste?**

I will clean up the bathroom after each time I use it.



***In the bedroom-***

Do I clean my own room?  
I will keep my room tidy.  
I will make my own bed every day.  
How often do I change sheets, covers, pillowcases?  
May I put pictures/posters in my room?  
May I rearrange my bedroom?  
Where may I store my suitcases?

***Girls only talk-***

Where do I buy my sanitary needs?  
**How do I dispose of these?**

***The telephone-***

Should I ask to use the telephone?  
May my friends call me?  
May I make:  
    Local calls?  
    Toll or long distance calls?  
    International calls?  
How much does it cost?  
How should I pay for my calls?  
Does it matter if I stay on the phone for a long time?

***The computer-***

May I use the computer for e-mail or internet access?  
    Is there a charge for the connection to the server? How much is it?  
How long and how often may I use the computer?

***Letters-***

When I have written letters, how do I send them?  
What does it cost for international postage? Local postage?  
Where will I find mail that has arrived for me?  
What address do I use for my incoming mail?

***Clothes-***

Where do I put my dirty clothes?  
What are the arrangements for washing clothes?  
    May I use the washing machine, dryer, sewing machine at any time?  
    Should I wash my own underwear?  
How are my clothes dried?  
Is there anything I should do to help?  
Where will I find my washed clothes?  
Would you like me to iron my own clothes?

***Going Out-***

What arrangements do I make with you if I go out with friends?  
What time must I be home?  
If I am delayed, what should I do?



To telephone, what is your number?

What coins or cards do I need to use the public phone?

When we go out as a family, do I pay for my own entrance fees, meals, etc.?

Am I to attend Rotary meetings? When are they?

How do I get around: Locally? To the city?

### ***School-***

How do I get to school and at what time?

Can I buy my lunch?

Do I pay for lunch?

Can I take a prepared lunch?

Do I prepare it?

I have been told I have to pay for any school uniforms.

Where do I get that uniform? How much does it cost?

Can the Rotary Club help me with the cost?

Are there any other items I need for school? Am I to pay for these?

Can I apply for a bus pass to travel to school?

Does the Rotary Club pay for my cost of travel to school?

Can I obtain a student concession card for public transport?

### **Around the house-**

What time must I get up on weekdays? On weekends?

What time must I go to bed?

What are your rules about friends visiting me during the day?

May they spend the night?

Where do I entertain them?

What are your rules about playing music: tapes or CD's?

I play an instrument. What are your rules about practice?

What are your rules about smoking?

If I am taking any medications, do you need to know why?

Where should this medication be kept?

What do I do if I feel sick?

Is there anything I should do to help around the house?

Do I have a key to the house?

What religious observances should I know about?

My religious observances are:\_\_\_\_\_.

What other holidays/events are celebrated?

When are your birthdays?

Pet peeves (dislikes) - Family:

- Parents
- Sons / Daughters
- Other family members
- Student

Punctuality Expectations - Family

- Student

Are any areas of the house strictly private?

Is there anything else I should know or do?



## **Improving Your Language Skills (after your arrival in your host country):**

As an exchange student, you will learn many things. Among the most rewarding will be the better understanding of another culture and, in many cases, the learning of a language that is foreign to your mother tongue. Since you will need the language to communicate with your hosts, your school friends, and your new acquaintances, you will have plenty of motivation to learn it. No matter whether you are totally new to it or have a fluency that comes from years of study, you'll be learning the new language in much the same way as you learned your own. You may already understand the words perfectly in the language, but still miss the spoken sentence. You'll miss the joke; you won't see the humor in situations; and you won't fully understand the roles different people play in your host culture (or give them the chance to fully understand you - and us) until you are fluent in the language.

There are dozens of strategies for learning a language with or without a teacher. All of them require you to use the language - read it, write it, speak it.

Here's a plan to follow.

- Plan to spend at least 30 minutes a day training in your host country language
- Listen to tapes of radio and video broadcasts in the language before beginning your exchange.
- Regularly scan a newspaper printed in that language and understand current issues and problems.
- Create your own opportunities to speak and write the new language by using it to keep a simple diary and write notes.
- Carry a small bilingual dictionary, translator or phrase book.
- Don't get frustrated when you don't know the word you want. Guess at it, but don't resort to your mother tongue – you'll have missed an opportunity to learn and increase your word power.
- Label items in your room with the host language name.
- Become creative when you don't know the word or phrase. Use the words you do know to discover the words you don't. - even if they are not exact. e.g., trying to discover the words for "Post Office", you might ask for "the store where I send letters."
- Read store "flyers" – you'll soon pick up the vocabulary for a range of things you recognize from the advertising pictures.
- Read a host country magazine published about some interests you have.
- Develop a "hierarchy of inquiry" approach to broaden your word power and understanding. e.g., in your first week, you'll be busy just understanding the basic words related to daily living. Next, venture into the names of items in your room; then the living room or kitchen, etc; then around the grounds of your home. After this, "discover" the street on which you live. Start from the "parts" to build an understanding of "the whole."

*When you have a grip on your new language, do not be alarmed if your fluency takes a nosedive for a short period. Your mind is just re-charging from the exhausting efforts. Everything - and more - will come back to you. Last, your dreams will be in the new host language. Congratulations! You've now crossed the border of cultural understanding.*

## **First Rotary Club Meeting**

- Wear Your Blazer!
- Take your sponsor club banner to exchange with them.
- Smile and shake hands with everyone.
- Ask specifically to meet the Club President, Youth Exchange Officer and Counselor.
- Give them our District 5470 Pins.
- Get the Counselor's full contact info.
- Gather info about your club.
- Ask if the club or city has an Interact Club you could join. Interact clubs are service clubs for high school students that are connected to Rotary. By joining Interact, you could meet new people and learn even more about your host city.



ROTARY DISTRICT \_\_\_\_\_

CLUB INFORMATION

MY HOSTING ROTARY CLUB

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

FOUNDED \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER OF MEMBERS \_\_\_\_\_

MEN \_\_\_\_\_

WOMEN \_\_\_\_\_

MEETS (TIME & PLACE) \_\_\_\_\_

PRESIDENT \_\_\_\_\_

PRESIDENT-ELECT \_\_\_\_\_

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES:

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES:

ROTARY FOUNDATION ACTIVITIES:

OTHER INTERESTING FACTS:

## Going to School

**ALL ROTARY YOUTH EXCHANGE STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO ATTEND FULL-TIME SCHOOL AT HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL, TO PARTICIPATE IN A MEANINGFUL WAY AND TO TAKE ALL PRESCRIBED TESTS AND EXAMINATIONS.**

Even if you have completed high school in your home country, do not ask or expect to be enrolled in college or university classes.

Although academic school credits are not the primary objective of our program, the attitude of school officials towards granting you time off for other activities will vary. There may be Rotary functions and Rotary-approved travel that will help to broaden your education.....but you must discuss these events with your Rotary YEO and your school principal in advance. You should establish ahead of time what the policy will be for you to take time off from school.

As an American or Canadian exchange student in a foreign school, you will be fairly obvious and you will be considered a representative (i.e. an ambassador) of your country by teachers and other students. Your behavior – good or bad – will be noticed. Be respectful of your principal and your teachers. Obey the school regulations, even if other students do not.

You will be expected to complete homework assignments the same as any member of your school class. Language may be an obstacle...but nobody will ask you to do more than your best.



Be aware of the dress code and customs of your fellow students. You may be different, but respect those around you.

Be aware that schools are places in which drugs, sexual harassment, and violence are not uncommon.

Not all students are nice and some may try to take advantage of you. Be friendly – but choose your friends with care. Avoid the “wrong crowd” and situations that might lead to breaking the law. You can be prosecuted for crimes in your host country, the same as any other resident of that country. Rotary cannot protect you from this.

Participate in school and sports activities outside of the classroom. It is the best way to meet others and begin healthy friendships.

Avoid spending too much time with other exchange students – though they will be the most “comfortable” group for you in the beginning. You need to stretch out of your “comfort zone” and make local friends with whom you can better integrate into your host culture.

Although you are there to learn their language and culture, be prepared to accept every opportunity to give talks about your country in your school and in other places within the community. Most of the people you meet will probably never have the chance to visit your home country, but they may be interested to know about it.

When you speak – do so carefully. Avoid making “good-bad” comparisons that might embarrass you or hurt others.

Ask your teacher, YEO, and/or counselor to help you prepare a talk if you are asked to give one.

## **Communications with Friends & Family at Home**

It’s natural to want to call your parents if you are struggling to fit into your new home the first few days. If you are feeling uncomfortable with your host family, club or environment shortly after your arrival, we STRONGLY encourage you to utilize the Rotary Chain of Command to solve these problems. Your local Rotary resources are the ones who can help you improve your situation. Unfortunately, your mom and dad back home won’t be able to do much to change your circumstances, but you can be sure they will worry about you.

That said, we don’t expect you to shut your family and friends back home out completely. It’s about balance: let your loved ones in Colorado know that you’re safe, you’re exploring your new home and meeting new people. Other than that, you should be leaning on your local Rotary contacts to help you solve issues and get your bearings.

## **Computer and Internet**

Discuss with your host family and/or teacher what the guidelines are for using the computer and what the guidelines are for using the internet. Be sure you understand time limits.

It is very important that you check your email regularly to be sure you receive any announcements from your exchange coordinators. For example, the Outbound Coordinator may use email to send you the questions for your monthly report.

Other than basic responsibilities, the computer and use of the internet should be kept at a MINIMUM. Social media is convenient but should be used for short visits only. Naturally you want to tell friends and family at home all that’s happening the first weeks of your exchange but you will adjust faster and easier if you write down your experiences in a journal. If you are chatting with old friends and parents all the time, you haven’t really left home yet.

## **Cell Phones**

Some host families or Rotary clubs may provide you with a cell phone for the convenience of the family, though they are not expected to provide you with a cell phone. The next family will set their own rules for cell phones.



If a host family gives you a cell phone, you must return it when you move to the next family unless your next host family and your YEO gives approval for you to keep it.

If you want to purchase your own cell phone, check with your Rotary officer on what is considered “acceptable use” policies in your host district. It can easily interfere with your adjustment.

Be sure to check with your school as to rules for cell phones. Many schools prohibit the use of cell phones on premises.

## **Social Media**

**Social Media can be a great way to keep in touch with friends you meet along the way but when used inappropriately it can result in an early departure from your host country.**

- ✓ Avoid inappropriate posts
  - No bullying
  - No swear words
  - Remember the Rotary rules and do not post things that indicate you are breaking them. Remember that Rotarians will likely be able to see your social media accounts and posts.
    - For example “Got all 4 Ds in 2 days. It was fun.” - The student thought they were being clever but it was still obvious what they meant
  - Do not post negative comments or personal details about your host family or host Rotary Club volunteers
  - When you comment on a friend’s post or picture it will become a part of your news feed and all of your friends will be able to see it
    - Don’t get involved in other people’s inappropriate posts or pictures – you can get in trouble even if you did not originate the comment or picture
  - Even if you are not Facebook friends with adults, remember some parents monitor their teenager’s Facebook account and they will see what you write
    - So don’t write anything you wouldn’t want your parents to see!
- ✓ Avoid inappropriate pictures
  - No Driving – Don’t even post pictures of yourself behind the wheel even if the car/motorcycle/ATV/snowmobile isn’t moving
  - No Drinking/Drugs – Don’t post pictures of yourself intoxicated or with alcohol even if you are not drinking it
    - We all know what is in those red cups so leave those pictures out too
  - No Dating – Intimate pictures do not belong on Facebook
    - Your relationship status should not reflect having a boyfriend/girlfriend in your host country while on exchange
  - Only include pictures of yourself and others wearing appropriate attire
  - Go through pictures prior to departure and delete any that may reflect negatively on you

**If a Rotarian or host parent asks you to remove something from your Facebook profile do it IMMEDIATELY!**

## **The Reports**

### **Monthly Report to MPRYE**

MPRYE is required to keep a record of your exchange activities during the year. We must have a regular report from you in order to accomplish this. The Communications Coordinator will send a link every month to help you complete this task.



## OUTBOUND STUDENT MONTHLY REPORT

Complete and e-mail to all of the following by the **10<sup>th</sup> of each month**:

DATE:

Your Name:

Your email address:

Hosting Rotary Club: \_\_\_\_Country: \_\_\_\_District:

Sponsoring Rotary Club: \_\_\_\_District: 5470

Your Rotary Counselor's Name:

Counselor's Mailing Address:

Counselor's Phone Numbers with country code: \_\_\_\_ (home) \_\_\_\_ (work)  
\_\_\_\_ (fax) \_\_\_\_ (e-mail)

Brief account of recent contact with counselor:

Current Host Family's Name:

Current Host Family's Mailing Address:

Current Host Family's Phone Numbers with country code: \_\_\_\_Email:

Next Host Family's Name:

Next Host Family's Mailing Address:

Next Host Family's Phone Numbers with country code: \_\_\_\_ (home) \_\_\_\_ (work)  
\_\_\_\_ (e-mail)

Date of anticipated move:

Do you have emergency contact information for your hosting club counselor, hosting district chairperson, local law enforcement and social services? (If not, please ask your hosting club counselor).

Give details of contact with other exchange students since last report:

What public speaking/community activities have you been involved in? Give examples of questions asked by your audience:

Give details of any Rotary meetings or functions you have attended. Include times you have been the guest of a Rotarian other than your host family:

What places have you visited? Give detail:

What social or sporting activities have you participated in? Give detail:

Explain any illness or difficulties with your host family, club, counselor, or school:

Do you feel safe, well cared for, and that those around you are concerned for your well-being?

**On a scale of 1-10**, how is your exchange experience going this month? (1=I want to go home, and 10=I want to live here forever). \_\_\_\_Are things getting easier or harder? \_\_\_\_ What are your biggest challenges right now? What are the most rewarding parts right now?



Have you corresponded with your sponsoring club since your last report? When and how?

Any other comments?

**BEFORE FEBRUARY 15th**, please be certain that you communicate your return plans; the date you are leaving and your travel itinerary.

**Reports to Your Host District -** *Complete host district reports as you have been instructed.*



# Part 4: Student Rules & Expectations

## Letter from an Exchange Student Alea Blanchard

Hi! My name is Alea Blanchard and my sophomore year I was 2024-25 outbound to Nakhon Sawan Thailand, from Carbondale colorado.

In my exchange year, I very heavily utilized some of the advice given to me before I left, and it was one of my most helpful resources, so I wanted to share some advice that has helped me on my exchange. Bring small gifts for your host family and Rotarians. In most cultures bringing a gift can help show your appreciation for your family while also sharing your culture with them. This can also be helpful to break tensions or show your appreciation for your family. At the end of the year, it's also really nice to give gifts to people such as your counselor and inbound coordinator as they typically do a lot for you throughout your exchange. Try to limit the amount of English you are speaking. This is much easier said than done and even if it's hard, making yourself speak the language helps. On my exchange, I was around mainly people who could speak pretty fluent English so I found it difficult to not start speaking in English, one of the things that helped me most was speaking only in my new language and if I didn't know a word then I would say just that word in English. It might sound funny to other people but it's an amazing way to start working on your speech.

It's perfectly normal to not have a ton of friends, especially right away when you don't speak the same language it can be hard to get close to people but you shouldn't worry about this too much, you might feel alone for a few weeks or even months but you will find you people. If you have another exchange student in your school, town, or city, spend time with them. Having friends from your host country helps learn about the language and culture though so don't stop trying to make new friendships with the people around you.

Say yes to everything. Rotary loves to say this but it is true. Some of the best memories from my exchange are going to markets or lunch with my host family. A lot of the time I didn't want to do stuff and I was tired but saying yes gives you the experiences, and you might only have one chance to get to do them. One of my friends always said "Do first, think later" Take risks, mistakes are just fun stories and you're only in your country for a limited time, you want to leave with the best memories that you can. Obviously you should still follow the rules and not do anything dangerous but have fun with the exchange and do everything.

Don't compare yourself to other exchange students. Especially with social media, you going to see a lot about other kids' experiences, and it's easy to get jealous or wish you were having those experiences but remember that what you're seeing is only showing the best and happiest parts of their exchange. During my exchange, there were multiple times that I would be jealous about a kid's experience and then I would talk to them and realize that they were having hard times or problems with things as well and I just couldn't tell because of how happy they seemed online.

Remember that exchange is not perfect, you will have problems, and that's okay. Communication can be hard so miscommunications do happen. If/when something does happen, talk it out with your host family and be understanding of their point of view. The culture is different so things that may seem normal to you won't be to them and vice versa. To avoid having many problems communicating with your family, ask if you don't understand something or why you cannot do something, and don't let it turn into a problem because you didn't communicate. And don't be afraid to reach out and use your chain of command. The chain of command is there for a reason and you should use it if you need help.

I hope that all of these tips help you have the best exchange year you possibly can and just know you are going to do amazing.



## **Program Rules and Conditions of Exchange**

As a Youth Exchange Student sponsored by a Rotary Club and/or District, you must agree to the following rules and conditions of exchange. Please note that individual districts may establish additional rules, as appropriate to the needs of students in their area.

**Rules and Conditions of Exchange — Violations will result in a district review and restrictions. Severe/Consistent disregard for these rules will result in being returned home.**

1. You must obey the laws of the host country. If found guilty of violating any law, you can expect no assistance from your sponsors or native country. You must return home at your own expense as soon as released by authorities.
2. You will be under the host district's authority while you are an exchange student and must abide by the rules and conditions of exchange provided by the host district. Parents or legal guardians must not authorize any extra activities directly to you. Any relatives you may have in the host country will have no authority over you while you are in the program.
3. You are not allowed to possess or use illegal drugs. Legal medications that are prescribed to you by a physician are allowed.
4. The illegal drinking of alcoholic beverages is expressly forbidden. Students who are of legal age should refrain. If your host family offers you an alcoholic drink, it is permissible to accept it under their supervision in the home. Excessive consumption and drunkenness is forbidden.
5. You may not operate a motorized vehicle, including but not limited to cars, trucks, motorcycles, aircraft, all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles, boats, and other watercraft, or participate in driver education programs.
6. Smoking is discouraged. If you state in your application that you do not smoke, you will be held to that position throughout your exchange. Your acceptance and host family placement is based on your signed statement. Under no circumstances are you to smoke in your host family's bedrooms.
7. Body piercing or obtaining a tattoo while on your exchange, without the express written permission of your natural parents, host parents, host club, and host district, is prohibited, for health reasons.
8. You must make every effort to learn the language of the host country, and may be responsible for any costs for tutoring, language camps, or other instruction.
9. Limit your use of the Internet and mobile phones, as directed by your host district, host club, and host family. Excessive or inappropriate use is not acceptable. Accessing or downloading pornographic material is expressly forbidden.
10. You must attend school regularly and make an honest attempt to succeed.
11. You must have health and accident or travel insurance that provides coverage for accidental injury and illness, death benefits (including repatriation of remains), disability/dismemberment benefits, emergency medical evacuation, emergency visitation expenses, 24-hour emergency assistance services, and legal services, in amounts satisfactory to the host Rotary club or district in consultation with the sponsor Rotary club or district, with coverage from the time of your departure from your home country until your return.
12. You must also have liability coverage through a travel insurance or other applicable policy, in amounts satisfactory to the host Rotary club or district in consultation with the sponsor Rotary club or district.
13. You must have sufficient financial support to assure your well-being during your exchange. Your host district may require a contingency fund for emergency situations. Unused funds will be returned to you or to your parents or legal guardians at the end of your exchange.
14. You must follow the travel rules of your host district. Travel is permitted with host parents or for Rotary club or district functions authorized by the host Rotary club or district with proper adult chaperones. The host district and club, host family, and your parents or legal guardians must approve any other travel in writing, thus exempting Rotary of responsibility and liability.
15. You must return home directly by a route mutually agreeable to your host district and your parents or legal guardians.
16. Any costs related to an early return home or any other unusual costs (language tutoring, tours, etc.) are the responsibility of you and your parents or legal guardians.



17. Visits by your parents or legal guardians, siblings, or friends while you are on exchange may only take place with the host club's and district's consent and within their guidelines. Typically, visits may be arranged only in the last quarter of the exchange or during school breaks and are not allowed during major holidays.
18. Serious romantic activity is to be avoided. Sexual activity is forbidden.
19. Talk with your host club counselor, host parents, or other trusted adult if you encounter any form of abuse or harassment.

### **Recommendations for a Successful Exchange**

1. You should communicate with your first host family prior to leaving your home country. The family's information will be provided to you by your host club or district prior to your departure.
2. Get involved in your school and community activities. Plan your recreation and spare-time activities around your school and community friends. Don't spend all your time with other exchange students. If there is a local Interact club, you are encouraged to join it.
3. Choose friends in the community carefully. Ask for and heed the advice of host families, counselors, and school personnel in choosing friends.
4. Respect your host's wishes. Become an integral part of the host family, assuming duties and responsibilities normal for a student of your age or for children in the family.
5. Learn ahead of time as much of the language of your host country as possible, and use the language regularly. Teachers, host parents, Rotary club members, and others you meet in the community will appreciate the effort. It will go a long way in your gaining acceptance in the community and with those who will become lifelong friends.
6. Do not borrow money. Pay any bills promptly. Ask permission to use the family phone or computer, keep track of all calls and time on the Internet, and reimburse your host family each month for the costs you incur.
7. Attend Rotary-sponsored events and host family events, and show an interest in these activities. Volunteer to be involved; do not wait to be asked. Lack of interest on your part is detrimental to your exchange and can have a negative impact on future exchanges.
8. If you are offered an opportunity to go on a trip or attend an event, make sure you understand any costs you must pay and your responsibilities before you go.

## **Travel**

### **Travel Guidelines**

The intent of the Rotary Youth Exchange Program is to provide students with an academic year abroad – which will encompass cultural and language immersion. Travel is a privilege, not a right. A host family may invite a student to travel with them. However, not every host family has plans to travel or has the ability to pay for travel.

Keep these things in mind:

- Remember that you have traveled a long way just to reach your host country.
- You will come to understand and meet the people better if you concentrate on your host town and area.
- Your host parents want you to enjoy your stay, but like any natural parents, they may not have time or money to travel often.
- You can have fun in your new surroundings. This is a wonderful opportunity to see and learn in another country and another culture. Travel is not the objective.
- Immerse yourself in the “everyday” things. This is what the cultural experience is all about! Simply taking a walk around town to look at the buildings may provide an interesting surprise.

You are not permitted to travel outside the Rotary District, except when being taken by a Rotarian, a Rotary host family or an adult person pre-approved by Rotary.

Trips organized through school and approved by the Rotary club and host family are permissible.



Rotary-sponsored functions are permissible – and sometimes expected. If you plan to participate in a Rotary-approved student tour, then you are responsible for the costs involved.

You must not travel outside your city of residence alone.

You are not permitted to take “road trips” with friends.

You must not hitchhike at any time.

You must not phone or write to any other Rotary club and ask to be hosted.

Rotary exchange students can not travel in aircraft other than a scheduled flight on a recognized airline.

If you have an opportunity to travel, we ask that you show sensitivity to other exchange students who may not have the same opportunity. It's OK to share your trip but not to boast.

At the end of an exchange, students are to travel home by the most direct route – you cannot make any stop-overs or side trips along the way.

**Any exceptions to travel rules must have written and signed approval of the student's natural parents, Host District YE Chair, Host Club and Host Family.**

Rotary's greatest concern is for student safety. Please respect the precautions that have been established. You might know of other programs in which students have more freedom to do as they wish. The Rotary Program, however, is oriented to structure and a student's best interests are in mind at all times.

If you were to explore the pros and cons of Rotary and other programs, you will likely discover that Rotary has a powerful reputation for producing young adults who go on to become leaders in their home communities and countries. We feel very secure with the structure and guidelines we have established for International Youth Exchange.

### **How to Arrange Special Travel Approval**

1. First obtain permission from your Host Rotary Club YEO
2. Students and YEO will be required to provide this information to the District:
  - a. Who they will travel with (must be accompanied by adults)
  - b. What they are doing (purpose of the trip)
  - c. Where they are going (destination address and phone number)
  - d. When they will travel (beginning and ending dates)
  - e. An emergency phone number during travels
  - f. ALL additional information that will describe their plans

**IF CROSSING AN INTERNATIONAL BORDER, YOU MAY NEED SPECIAL DOCUMENTS.** You will get those from the HOST DISTRICT CHAIRMAN.

### **Visits from Natural Parents**

Your host district will have restrictions on parent visits. If your parents intend to visit you while you are abroad, you must check with your district officer about their specific guidelines. At the very least, your parents cannot visit you until near the end of your year (usually April or later). Family visits are not allowed during holiday times. It is of great cultural significance for a student to experience holidays with their host culture...and it is also very meaningful for the host country and host families to share these celebrations with their “adopted” son or daughter.



It is our experience that students regularly suffer severe culture shock for a second time after parents depart for home and leave the student behind to finish the year. It is most stressful for the student who must re-experience the pain of separation. However, host families and youth exchange officers are also exhausted with effort to help these students who are suffering – because the emotional changes will include anger, resentment, withdrawal and deep sadness....(similar to the stages of grief).

**PARENTS: If you are tempted to ‘bend’ or break this rule** – remind yourself that you are going to hurt your son or daughter by a mid-year visit. We are very sincere and firm in this opinion. You will risk ending your child’s exchange year by breaking this rule.

## **The Four Ds**

### **Cardinal Rules for Youth Exchange Students**

**There are many situations in which you can find yourself on a plane home...early.** The most obvious cause would be if you break the laws of your host country....*that is if you are not in jail.* The Four D’s address offenses that can get you into trouble and might result in your exchange being terminated.

**No DRUGS -** Any association with drugs, drug users or drug dealers will violate the intention of and spirit of youth exchange. If you find yourself in the company of anyone who falls into this category – get out of the situation as quickly as you can. You were selected because you are a leader. Do not behave like a follower.

**No DRINKING** – In some countries, alcohol may be consumed at meals. If offered by your host parents in this circumstance, you may accept.

Regardless of the legal drinking age in your host country, you are not permitted to drink alcohol with friends at parties or in bars. Alcohol abuse may be grounds for termination of your exchange year.

**No DRIVING** – **You cannot drive any motorized vehicle while on exchange.** Your health insurance will not pay for injuries while driving any motorized vehicle. This includes cars, motorcycles, scooters, farm vehicles, power boats, snowmobiles, personal watercraft, etc. You cannot afford to be involved in an accident in which you are the driver. *Do not take this risk. You will not be covered by your insurance.*

**No DATING** – You should not become romantically involved during your year abroad. It will lead to emotional stress, and will take away from the objectives of your year...which is to meet many people and enjoy many activities.

### **Additional D’s**

**No Downloading** – You should not download illegal music or movies while on exchange. You should also not watch/download any inappropriate content.

**No Decorating** – You should not deface your body by getting any tattoos or piercings while on exchange.



## The 6 Bs of an Exchange Student

### 1. Be First

I am a person of action!

### 2. Be Curious

I seek to understand!

### 3. Be on Purpose

I am certain of my outcome and steadily move toward it!

### 4. Be Grateful

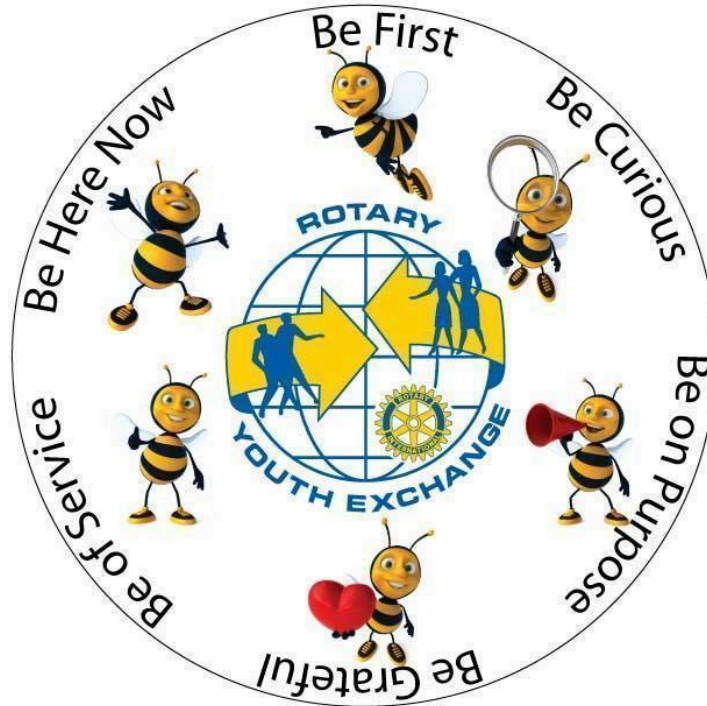
I focus on things for which I can be thankful!

### 5. Be of Service

I give of myself!

### 6. Be Here Now

I live in the present moment!





# Part 5: The Tough Times

## Culture Shock

Most people who move to a new culture experience a series of emotional ups and downs while they are living there, especially during the early months when most major adjustments are taking place. The emotional low points that go along with adaptation to a new culture may cause you some anxiety. The “down periods” are an indication that you are experiencing culture shock.

Culture shock is a reaction most people feel when they are cut off from familiar ways of communication and interaction with others.

Culture shock is not always easy to notice. It usually builds up slowly, challenging a person’s subconscious belief that the way they have always done things in their homeland is the “right way” to do things.

**Common symptoms of culture shock include:**

- **Over eating**
- **Boredom**
- **Easily upset**
- **Isolation**
- **Homesickness**
- **Sleeping too much**
- **Idealizing homeland**
- **Inability to concentrate**
- **Unexpected crying spells**
- **Negative attitude toward foreign country**

Most people react to culture shock in any of three typical ways:

1. They try to make other people do things *their* way
2. They isolate themselves from the culture
3. They learn to adapt

The first two reactions are entirely normal and common, but in the long run they do not offer the opportunity to absorb more than just a small part of the new culture. In addition, the first two make it nearly impossible for you to be successful and can result in major adjustment problems.

**The third reaction is much more desirable. We try to encourage our students with the motto,  
“It’s not right, it’s not wrong, it’s just different!”**

In order to get you on the right track when dealing with culture shock, we suggest the following:

- It is important that you recognize the symptoms.
- When you see the first signs, try to focus your energy in more positive directions.
- Get more involved in family activities, such as preparing the meal, walking the dog, raking the yard, washing the car, shopping for groceries, etc. It is important that you get involved and stay involved.
- Remember that your daily life will only get better!
- Make a list of everything you’d miss if you were to leave your host country and return home.
- Ask yourself: Why did I want to come on exchange? Am I here for the long-haul, or not? What would I think of myself in the future if I were to give up and go home now?



We encourage students to limit their telephone calls home to no more than one or two a month and to limit emails. Frequent contact with family and friends back home can delay your adjustment. Your natural parents should be made aware of these suggested limitations. It is important to have their support for this, especially in the early months.

You will certainly have periods of homesickness, especially around special holidays. Plan to share some of your special celebrations with your host family. This can be a wonderful learning experience for everyone and will ease any loneliness you are feeling.

The culture shock stage begins roughly at the end of the first month and extends sometimes until the fourth month. Seasoned host families report that a student experiencing culture shock might:

- Dread going to school because classmates are “unfriendly”
- Lash out in anger because of an innocent remark at the dinner table, or make a retreat to the bedroom for hours
- Long for family and friends back home who “really understand”
- Withdraw at times, become irritable, ignore rules or exhibit unusual shyness
- Describe confusing or threatening situations as “stupid” or “dumb”
- Complain about feeling unloved or unjustly criticized
- Escalate minor squabbles with other family members into standoffs
- Find it difficult to hold normal conversations

### **Things You Can Do to Survive This Period**

Discuss the meaning of culture shock with your family and talk about your feelings. Remind yourself that culture shock behavior is normal. (Sometimes students think this only happens to “weak” or “immature” students.) Remember these points:

- It’s OK to miss home and to feel sad. Sometimes talking about it helps the pain go away. So if you want to talk, go to your host family, or find a nearby friend.
- Culture shock is normal. It can be difficult to be away from home for a long period of time.
- Your host family can never take the place of your real family, but they care for you very much. You can depend on their support.
- Get out of your room and get active!
- Call or email home less frequently. You might initially feel better after talking to family, but an hour later, you will feel more homesick.
- Limit emailing or calling international friends no more than twice a month.

## **STRESS KIT**

### **Packing Your Stress Kit**

1. Treat food that you like - Something like Skittles, a favorite package of cookies, Reese's Peanut Butter Cups - you may not be able to find your favorite treat food and having it on a bad day can make a difference.
2. Picture of you doing something you enjoy - keeps you anchored to who you are and what you feel good about. However, it should not include pictures of friends as this contributes to home sickness.
  - A picture of you in your soccer uniform, not you with the soccer team
  - A picture of you playing the drums, not a picture of you with the band
  - A picture of you with an award
3. Memento from home that makes you feel good - a stuffed animal, favorite t-shirt, a favorite pillow, a necklace - do not make this something that will feed into homesickness - your favorite stuffed animal, not the one you just got from your relationship, who you miss and want to go home to, not the gift your best friend gave you



4. Relaxation activity - a small craft (beading, an embroidery kit, something you enjoy and can transport), a deck of cards (solitaire or teaching a game to host family), your music (that you can play with your host family)
5. Favorite book or a book in your home language - when it just feels too much to be processing the other language and you have the “focus headache,” read in your home language - the familiarity of the language, the fact that you like the book, helps you to relax and reduce stress (don’t be reading daily). Further into the year, read your favorite book in your host language.
6. Journal - write down something positive everyday - maybe something you saw, something you were grateful for, something you accomplished. Also use the journal to write down when it is a bad day, then wait a day or two before you decide what to do - Just writing the bad can help it feel better. Reread the good things as well.
7. A letter to yourself about why you are doing this and why you want to get through it. Set goals for what you want to accomplish and make a list of everything you would miss if you had to leave your host country. When you are stressed and anxious you need to find your internal motivation to get through it.

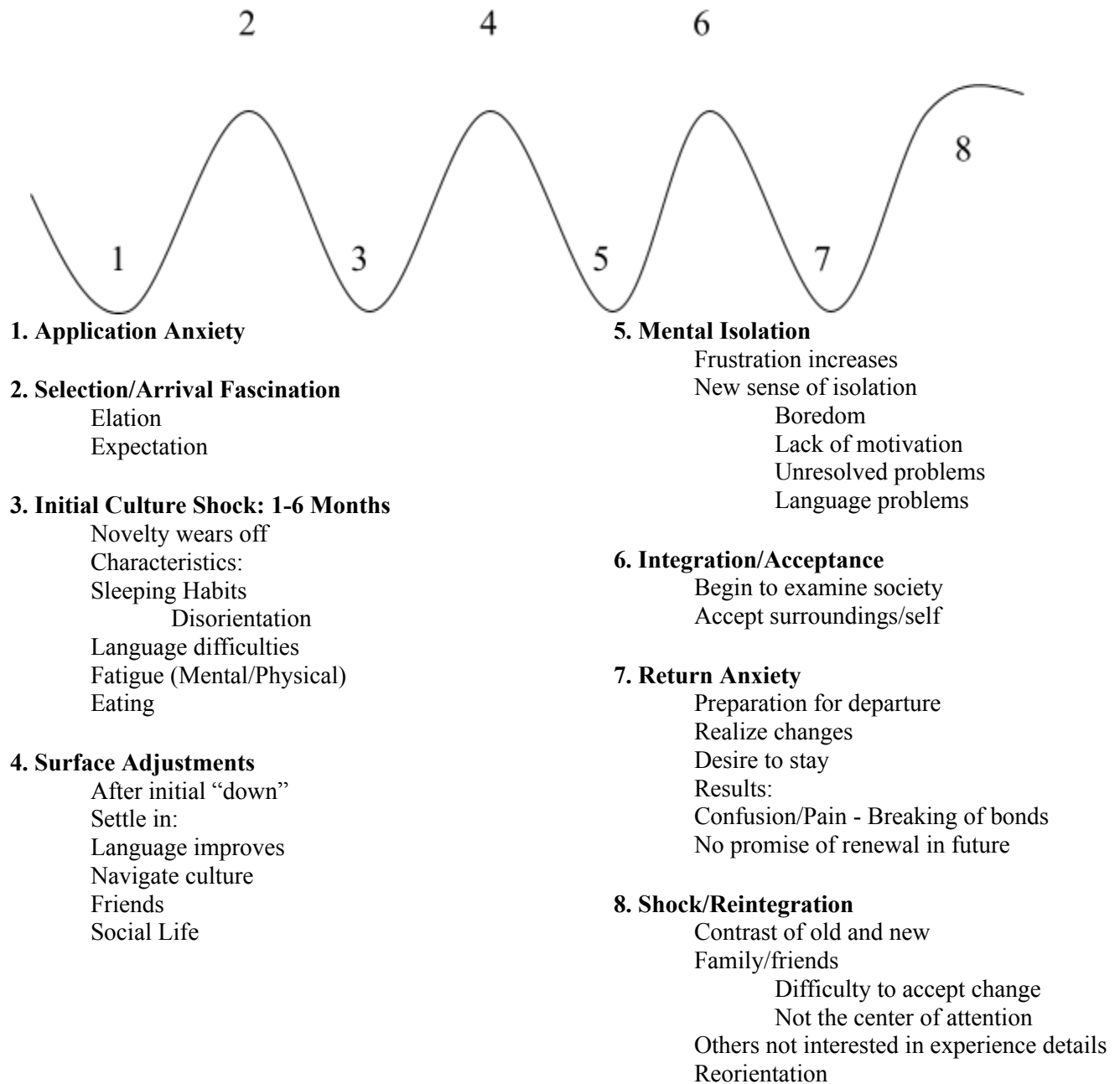
### **Serious Warning Signs**

- Excessive sleeping or insomnia
- Significant weight gain or loss
- Prolonged acute depression
- Constantly feeling sick and/or feeling like you do not want to go to school
- Excessive calls or emails home
- Excessive calls or emails from parents
- Perpetual feelings of anger toward others
- Serious problems with your host family
- Beginning to feel you MUST go home
- Suicidal thoughts, feelings or actions

**Please talk to a trusted adult near you IMMEDIATELY!**



## The Exchange Cycle



## Tough Questions That May Be Asked of You

Many exchange students report being put "on the spot" by their peers, host parents, family members, and/or Rotarians during their year when they are asked questions about home country politics, environment, economy, society, etc. You can be caught off guard.

It is your responsibility as a Youth Exchange "ambassador" to be knowledgeable of what is "going on at home." Read a variety of newspapers and magazines, watch a variety of news channels, etc. Information is available at school and community libraries, and on the Internet.

Your hosts and others you meet abroad have an honest interest in knowing and learning more about your home country. They rarely ask questions to criticize, make you uncomfortable or to test you (though that also may be your impression if you are not prepared).



These questions are meant to start you thinking and learning about your own culture BEFORE you go. They represent actual questions that our prior students have been asked while overseas.

### **The Questions:**

1. What is your family life like? Is it true that your mother rules the house and that you never eat together as a family? What are your family values?
2. Why do you put old people in nursing homes rather than take care of them at home like we do?
3. Are Americans really happy? All we see on TV and in your movies is divorce, husbands and wives cheating on each other, killing and crime, drugs, cults. Is it really not safe to walk downtown at night?
4. Why do the different races all distrust and hate one another? Why do the white people treat the Blacks so badly? Why do you keep the Indians on reservations in such poverty?
5. Your election is coming up. Tell us a little about each of the candidates. Why do Americans like Donald Trump? Why did Americans elect President Biden? Why does the U.S. only have two candidates for president? How many political parties do you have?
6. Did you read about our country before you came? Tell me some of the things you learned about our government and how we handle health care. What are some things you'd like to know more about?
7. We are going to take you to our capital next weekend. Can you tell me anything about it?
8. What's your school like? You've been here a few months now. Compare your school with ours. Which one do you like better? We have been told that our schools are more difficult because we give our students more responsibility to learn. You have to attend but you don't have any national exam to get into University like we do. What do you think?
9. Your citizens seem to waste a lot of energy and we have to pay more for gas and oil because you waste it. You all drive big cars, have lots of appliances, live in your own homes, and you don't seem to care about the rest of us on a day-to-day basis. How would you change things to make your citizens more energy conscious?
10. What is the Peace Corps? What do they do nowadays? Are they really just young people trained to be government agents and spies?
11. And, currently, anything and everything about the Middle East, Israel, Palestine, Ukraine and Russia, etc., etc., etc.
12. Describe how the government works in the United States of America. (Refer to your notes from Steve Erkenbrack's presentation at Orientation #1.)

### **Responding:**

There are many more questions that may be asked. In addition to being knowledgeable, you also need to consider how best to respond when asked. The following are a few recommendations to help you avoid confrontation and argument. Remember, no one ever really wins an argument. Avoid getting drawn into one.



Start out your response with, "I'm not sure I understand your question but I think..."; " ...Yes, but I think...;" "...You may be right, but another way to look at it is..... ;". OR the BEST line: **"Many Americans agree with you...."**

Avoid these discussions when you are in a hurry. You need time to consider your responses.

Use examples whenever you can, as they help to illustrate a point and usually are more easily understood, especially when there is a language barrier.

Remind others that what they see and hear on TV, radio and in the newspapers may be a distortion, just the same as what we see may be a distortion of their country, and that both of you need to learn from each other what the truth is from your respective perceptions.

Give your questioners time to explain themselves and try to have an open discussion. Remember that each of your cultures and backgrounds are DIFFERENT and neither is right or wrong.

## **Student Protection – Sexual Abuse & Harassment Policy**

MPRYE and Rotary International take seriously our role to protect students from harassment or abuse. With Rotary, you can be assured that there is help nearby no matter where you happen to be around the globe. We have established an international guideline for Protection of Students from Harassment or Abuse.

When you arrive in your host country, you will be given additional training on the safety procedures that you can follow during your exchange experience overseas.

With that training, you should be provided with **names and phone numbers** of Rotarians and victim assistance programs that will provide safety and assistance if needed. We will ask for these names and phone numbers as a part of each monthly report to ensure you have them.

If you do not understand your rights, or need further help, you should contact a trusted Rotarian immediately.

While Harassment and Abuse are very serious issues, you also need to be sensitive to the fact that there is a potential for misunderstandings in cross-cultural situations. What might be acceptable conduct in one country may be offensive in another. Customs, gestures, and manners all differ greatly among the many cultures represented in our inbound youth exchange class, and even between the American and Canadian cultures. Communication from you is important in resolving problems before they get out of hand. However, when a problem reaches the level of 'harassment,' then it is time to take action.

At all times, you can be assured that we have taken every precaution to make this exchange year a rewarding and pleasant life experience. We are always here to help and to guide you through problems, whatever they may be.

## **Responsibilities: YEO, Counselor & Student**

**Your Rotary host club will appoint a Youth Exchange Officer (YEO) and a counselor for you.** If you do not have a Rotary-appointed counselor, you should find an adult advocate. Your YEO and counselor should NOT be host parents. When you arrive, you should **ask your hosts who your YEO and counselor are, and make contact with them** in person if they do not contact you. All Rotary officers are unpaid volunteers who work with the program because they support the meaning of youth exchange.

The following are basic international guidelines for YEO's, Counselors and Students:

[www.mountainandplainsrye.com](http://www.mountainandplainsrye.com) [www.facebook.com/mprye](https://www.facebook.com/mprye)



## Host YEO Responsibilities (Administrator)

1. To confirm who the host parents will be during a student's stay. To arrange the date and time of changing host families.
2. To orient the host parents & students as to their responsibilities.
3. To arrange for schooling and introduce student to principal/teachers.
4. To look after student's emergency fund and other important papers.
5. To check that insurance coverage is suitable to the local situation and to ensure that activities (such as sports) are covered.
6. To introduce and integrate student into the Host Rotary Club and ensure that student is invited as a guest to meetings and other activities.
7. To be sure that students receive monthly allowance from the host club on time.
8. To deal appropriately with any unresolved difficulties between students and host families and school.
9. To give permission for travel and other situations in which permission is due, and to ensure that permission has been obtained from natural parents, host parents, and school.
10. To find out the dates of the required meetings – and to arrange for transportation. Students should be told of these events well in advance, to help avoid schedule conflicts.
11. To obtain appropriate funds from the host club to cover travel, food and board expenses for student attendance at required meetings.
12. To notify students of any Rotary-approved tours for exchange students in which they might be able to participate.

## Host Counselor Responsibilities (Advocate/Friend)

1. To meet with students once or twice per month, to give students sound advice, and to deal with any problems, fears and worries that students may have.
2. To advocate for a student when he/she is having difficulties at home or at school.
3. To help a student with self-discipline if he/she goes off track.

## Student Responsibilities

While overseas, you are NOT on an extended vacation. You are expected to adjust to your new home, as a member of your host family and a student in your new high school. IN ADDITION, you are expected to participate in your HOST Rotary Club activities, and very likely will be invited as a guest speaker to more than one engagement during your year abroad.

1. **Ask for a list of what is expected.** If not written, this can be done verbally and you can write down the points.
2. **Use the counselor when you need a shoulder to lean on.** It will keep the relationship between students and host families less complicated.
3. **Show appreciation for all that hosts do for you.**
4. **Keep counselor & YEO informed of all your activities.**
5. **Always speak the TRUTH to the YEO and Counselor!** You need their trust and their guidance.
6. **Discuss problems while they are still small.** Don't wait until things are out of hand before talking to someone.
7. **Accept the decisions and discipline of the YEO and Counselor with grace....even if you disagree.** He/she is guiding you in the place of natural parents.
8. **Do not play your YEO, your counselor, and host parents against one another.** Make friends – not adversaries!

IF a situation arises that you feel you need to speak to a counselor of your gender, ask if this can be arranged. IF you and your counselor have a clash of personalities, or if he/she seems too busy for you – contact your YEO or Club President and ask if it is possible to change counselors. If that is not possible, then try hard to make the best of things. Adapt your personality and help build the bridge between you.



IF all else has failed – contact your Inbound Coordinator -- write, e-mail or call. Almost anything can be sorted out with the assistance of the Host District Inbound Coordinator.



## Rotary Support System Model – Follow Steps in this Order

We also call this following the **Chain of Command**

Sponsor District CURRENT contact info found at

[www.mountainandplainsrye.com/about/country-coordinators](http://www.mountainandplainsrye.com/about/country-coordinators)

[www.mountainandplainsrye.com/about/district-committee](http://www.mountainandplainsrye.com/about/district-committee)

RESOURCE	WHEN NEEDED	CONTACT FREQUENCY	COMMENTS
<b>Host Family</b>	Every Day	Daily	Your first point of contact with most simple needs. For problems, you will need to use your host club YEO in conjunction with your host family.
<b>Host Club Counselor</b>	Problems, Successes, Social Occasions	Monthly	This is your advocate for solving problems when things go wrong – to provide advice, support and help when needed.
<b>Host Club YEO</b>	Structuring your year, planning activities	Monthly	This is your Rotary contact for host family issues, rules, travel permissions, meeting attendance, stipends, etc.
<b>Host District Coordinator</b>	Routine reporting, serious problems.	As Needed	If reports are required, make sure you complete them.
<b>Host District Chairman</b>	Unresolved problems, routine reporting	As Needed	
<b>Sponsor D5470 Country Coordinator</b>	Routine reporting, problems not solved by previous channels	Monthly	This is your main contact in our district. Monthly Reports MUST be sent. This is the FIRST person that should learn of a problem that has not been addressed in your host country!
<b>Sponsor D5470 Outbound Coordinator</b>	Routine Reporting	Monthly	Monthly Reports MUST be sent. If your Country Coordinator is unable to provide assistance, go to the Outbound Coordinator (Megan Webber).
<b>Sponsor D5470 Chairman</b>	Very Serious Problems	As Needed	If the Country Coordinator and Outbound Coordinator are unable to provide assistance, go to the District Chair (Kristi Redlinger).
<b>ROTEX</b>	Advice and support	As Needed	Will not be able to help with technical issues. They are for your emotional support and mentoring only.
<b>Sponsor Club YEO</b>	Preparation and then report about your experience	Monthly	You should write to your club regularly to tell them about your experiences.
<b>Parents</b>	Routine, non-YE problems, health emergencies	As Needed	LIMIT contact. Write letters instead of emailing and phoning! Skype once per month.



# Part 6: Making the Best of Your Exchange

## Letter from an Exchange Student

Dakota Grant

“Aren’t you terrified to leave your parents, family, and home?”

Yes, of course I am, but any fear of the inevitable homesickness is entirely outweighed by the fear of not doing an exchange, not traveling the world, and not improving myself as a person from those experiences. Trust me, I definitely had my own share of “emotional breakdowns” before leaving. “Oh my gosh, what if I forget to put something in my suitcase?” or “What if I’m speaking in Spanish and accidentally pronounce *hola* in a thick southern accent (from habit)?” are all thoughts that frequently ran through my mind before leaving and caused a lot of unnecessary stress. So my best advice for anxiety is to not even start with the “What if’s” because they are going to cause more stress than necessary. But most of all, I don’t want you to worry about your host family. My first host family, which is my current host family, have been the best and most accepting people that I have ever met in my life. Especially my host father, Juan — he truly is the best host father that I could have possibly been placed with. In my personal family life, I don’t have a strong father figure and I grew up accepting of that. However, since the first day in my host family's house, Juan has done an amazing job of including me and treating me like one of his own.

It wasn't something I noticed much until I was sick one day. I woke up with a terrible headache, and when Juan came to check if I was awake to get ready for school, I tried to tell him (keep in mind he is the only one in my host family who doesn't speak any English). Eventually, after motioning at my head and making a sad face, I finally got him to understand that I had a headache. He walked me back to my room and told me to get back into bed and then left. He came back a minute later with a pitcher of water, a glass and some Ibuprofen. He sat with me as I took the Ibuprofen and drank at least one glass of water, and then he tucked me back into bed and told me to go back to sleep. He probably didn't realize it, but that kind of support really meant a lot to me, especially in the first couple of months that I was in school because my brain was pretty much fried after every day (Spanish is harder than I realized).

This relationship that I created with my host father is one that I will always cherish, and there's not a day that I won't miss him when I leave. For me, this is the biggest point of exchange, and it was my most important goal — to make relationships and memories to cherish for a lifetime. I would say I was successful in this goal, and I know you will be too. You got this!!

Dakota Grant

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## **Thriving – Not Just Surviving**

### **Approaching an Intercultural Experience Positively**

#### **Make Sure You Are Physically and Emotionally Prepared**

**Being immersed in a new culture takes a lot of energy.** Make sure you get enough rest so you can get up in the mornings with the rest of your host family.

**Pay attention to your exercise and healthy eating habits and follow a routine that works for you. Expect to gain weight** but don't be fussy when it comes to food. It is the change in environment and food preparation practices that cause the weight gain. For the duration of your exchange, experience the food variety and enjoy what is new and different. When you return at the end of the exchange year, any weight gain you suffered will probably come off easily.

#### **Work to Remain Positive and Take Responsibility For Your Words and Actions**

The intercultural writer Margaret Pusch notes that the three skills critical to being effective in an overseas experience are:

1. The ability to manage psychological stress
2. The ability to communicate effectively
3. The ability to establish interpersonal relationships

“Cross-cultural experience is stressful and cultural ‘fatigue’ does occur: in fact it is argued that it is only with this fatigue that one is receptive to understanding and accepting cultural differences.” (Ken House D5060)  
But, when that happens, you may surprise yourself with your own negative behaviors. Manage those feelings and keep them under control.

You should realize that the subconscious “values” and “assumptions” which guide our thinking and actions are unmistakably “North American.” Understanding the basis of our culture is a starting point for understanding another culture.

### **More tips...**

Attend as many meetings of your host Rotary Club as possible. Attend their functions; expect to help with events. If Rotary meetings conflict with personal plans, the Rotary function must take precedence. Always accept personal invitations from Rotarians before visiting with friends.

Dress neatly and appropriately, especially for Rotary functions (wear your Rotary blazer!)

Greetings and farewells are very important in all countries. Acknowledge everyone when you arrive or leave (on a daily basis). You will find differences in customs between your peers, your host families, and other social groups. For instance, teens often simply speak a greeting (“Hi” or “Hey”); families often hug or pat a shoulder. At Rotary meetings most people will shake your hand.



Ask your host family to tell you if you do anything which they see as inappropriate or objectionable. You might offend someone with a gesture or a phrase that means something entirely different in your home culture as it does here.

Use good language at all times, in order not to offend anyone. Swearing and telling dirty jokes does not enhance your own or your country's image.

Use of the bathroom is an area of potential misunderstanding. Make sure your use of it fits in with the rest of your host family. If you take lengthy showers, there may not be hot water for others.

**If you become ill – even if it's only a sore throat – tell your host parents immediately. Always consult your host family before visiting a doctor.**

Saying “**thank you**” is very important in most cultures. Make sure you thank people who take you places and do things for you. A “thank-you” note may be expected - at the very least it is especially appreciated.

You may or may not be expected to attend church with your host family. Try to fit in with what their expectations are and maintain an attitude of respect towards religious practices in your host families. Be sure to share your religious expectations with them; they will appreciate and try to accommodate you.

By using appropriate manners and behaviors in your host family, you will make it easier for your host parents to be good hosts. Consider the situation from their point of view whenever you can.

Maintain a wide circle of friends of all ages. This will ensure that you learn as much as you can about your new culture.

You may accumulate a lot of souvenirs during your exchange year. You should plan on sending boxes home by regular mail or plan to pay excess baggage/overweight charges on your return flight home. Check with your airline to determine what your luggage weight limits are as they are very strict. Also, be informed about customs regulations – they are changing almost daily. If you are carrying things home with you, list all purchases and pack them together to expedite your time spent in customs.

## **SEVEN LESSONS WE CAN LEARN IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Adapted from ‘Figuring Foreigners Out’ by Craig Storti  
“We learn from experience that not everything which is incredible is untrue.”  
-Cardinal DeRetz

1. When you go abroad, or meet people from abroad, try to entertain the notion that they might be very different from you. If it turns out they aren't, all the better. If it turns out they are, score one for your side.
2. What you think of as “normal human behavior” may only be cultural. Before you project your “norms” onto the human race, consider that you might be wrong.
3. Familiar behaviors may have different meanings. The same behavior – saying “yes” for example – can exist in different cultures and not mean the same thing. Just because you've recognized a given behavior, don't assume therefore that you have understood it.
4. Don't assume that what you meant is what was understood. Check for signs that the other person did or did not understand you.
5. Don't assume that what you understood is what was meant.



6. You don't have to like or accept "different" behavior, but you should try to understand where it comes from.
7. Most people do behave rationally. You just have to discover the rationale.

### **The Twelve Commandments of *Youth Exchange***

1. Adapt to all situations
2. Ask questions to help you understand
3. Smile at every opportunity
4. Be lively and active
5. Be punctual
6. Plan ahead
7. Be considerate of your hosts
8. Give 100% of yourself and expect nothing in return.
9. Maintain a neat appearance and keep your surroundings orderly
10. Strive to earn the respect of others
11. Learn and share
12. Say 'No' when it is appropriate

### **FOUR STEPS TOWARD PEACE**

**From the Rotary Melbourne Peace Bells Project**

***FIRST* Seek Peace Within**

***SECOND* Make Peace At Home**

***THIRD* Create Peace In Your Community**

***FOURTH* Foster Peace Between Peoples and Lands**

### **Letter From an Exchange Student**

**Anja Nasralla**

It was a Saturday and I was feeling bored so I decided to take a walk around Alicante and do some touristy things. As I was strolling, snapping photos, a girl approached me. She asked, "Hey, do you speak English?"

"I do!" I replied.

"Do you live here or are you a tourist?"

I was slightly embarrassed that she'd caught me taking photos, thinking I was just another tourist. "I'm not from here, but I live here!" I said, trying to play it cool.

She introduced herself and told me she was from Finland, doing a solo weekend trip to Alicante because the flights were cheap. It was her last night in Alicante and she asked me what I was doing.



“I’m just walking around, bored,” I replied.

“Can I join you?” she asked.

“Um, sure!” I said, not really sure what was happening, but happy for the company.

We kept walking, no real destination in mind, and she told me she was studying fashion in Finland. We chatted more and I mentioned how much I love thrifting, but that I hadn’t been able to find any good thrift stores in Alicante. She lit up and told me she’d found one. I was so excited, I couldn’t help but jump up and down and we headed in that direction, stopping at interesting shops along the way and talking the entire time.

I showed her some of my favorite spots in the city, and we talked for about three hours. At the end, she thanked me, saying how much fun she had and how glad she was that she approached me. She said if she hadn’t, she would have spent the night alone in her hotel, and I probably would’ve been wandering aimlessly too. It was a simple encounter, but it made me reflect on how much my life has changed.

This is just one example of the incredible things that can happen when you’re alone on the other side of the world. I never imagined I’d be fluent in Spanish by the time I graduated high school or living in a foreign country for a year. This experience has already changed me, and I’m only halfway through. I’ve still got five months left, and who knows what kind of person I’ll be by the end of it?

Sometimes I have to step back and remind myself just how different my life is now. I’m 17, exploring a foreign country, having the most unexpected and random experiences and interactions I never could have imagined. There are moments when I just stop and think, “Wow, what even is this?”

The life skills I’ve gained are incredible and invaluable. I’m attending a school where everything is in Spanish, in a country where English is not the primary language — and I’m actually doing it. It hasn’t been easy, though. The last five months have been full of every emotion. There are days I wake up feeling homesick, depressed and just low, only to have one of the best days of my life later. Or, on the flip side, I might start the day feeling fine, then a few hours later find myself on the verge of tears, questioning, “What am I even doing here?”

I’ve dreamed of this my whole life, and now, in high school, I’m living it — learning a new language and turning that dream into reality. No, it’s not exactly what I imagined, and at first, that was hard to come to terms with. I had a set image of what this exchange would look like, but it’s been completely different — better and worse, all at the same time. The challenges and surprises have made this journey uniquely mine. You can’t predict the difficult situations or the amazing experiences you’ll have.

You’re forced to leave the life you’ve built in your home country and create an entirely new life in a place that doesn’t feel real. And then, in just a few months, you have to leave that life behind and go back, a completely changed person, with new experiences and perspectives of EVERYTHING.



I'll be forever grateful for this exchange. I still can't fully grasp how amazing and difficult it's been, and how much I've changed. Just thinking about all the experiences I've had gives me this weird, almost butterfly feeling in my stomach — like I'm content, relaxed and completely in awe of it all.

The best advice I would give: Just do it. Why not? You will always have doubt but overcoming that doubt and embarrassment is what makes this experience so rewarding. Think of why you shipped yourself off across the world; everyone has a reason. And when the times are tough, remember that reason. Also don't be too hard on yourself. As long as you try, this will be one of the best years of your life.

Anja Nasralla

Pagosa Springs — Spain, 2024-25

### **You are tomorrow's leaders.**

*Rotarians believe that the future of our world is in the hands of our young students.*

Your year will FLY by (although it may not seem so at the beginning). When you return, you will have a wealth of experiences and a new language and culture to share with your homeland. PLEASE talk about the positive things you have learned to your family, your friends at school, and your sponsor Rotary club.

We believe that the more we send our young ambassadors abroad, the greater opportunities we will have to foster understanding between our cultures and people around the world. Your success will be our best advertisement. Through you and other Rotary students, we seek to make peace around the globe and you have now become an important factor in helping us to achieve those goals.

**We can't wait to hear about your experiences. We will be waiting for you!**



## Rotary Youth Exchange Outbound Student Calendar

MONTH	PHASE	WHAT YOU SHOULD BE DOING	REMINDERS
1	TRAVEL & HONEYMOON	Get busy. Remember that these first few weeks are your chance to make life-long friends. It is not the time to be shy. Take it all in and get to know your surroundings. Meet your Rotary Club members. Find your routine. Work on your language skills. Identify your cultural mentor, possibly a member of your host family or a friend at school.	Watch the phone calls and social media
2	END OF HONEYMOON / START OF ADAPTATION	Start with good habits. Write in your journal every night. Mark on a calendar what you did every day. Answer the phone from time to time. Get to know your host parents. Learning the language is your priority. Watch for homesickness. Use your support system. Keep busy. Cook an "American meal" for your host family.	<u>Write home</u>
3	ADAPTATION	Homesick? Don't call home! Talk to your Rotary or ROTEX support people. Don't dump it on your parents. Get out of that funk. Break the routine a little every day to keep things fresh. Avoid spending long amounts of time by yourself. Having trouble with the language? Find someone to talk to; a host sibling, a "cultural mentor" or even your Rotary Counselor. Give and take. Make a trade; host language for English.	
4	ADAPTATION	Have you made many friends yet? If not, get out there and mingle. Remember, you want to make as many people miss you as you can when you leave. There is nothing better to make you stop thinking about yourself than to help someone else. If you are feeling a little lost, find someone in need and give him/her a hand. You will get it back x10. You might hit a language plateau here. Keep working the language. Try something new. Speak at your Rotary Club. If you move host families, you might have another challenge. Make the best of it. Teach them about Thanksgiving.	Send holiday presents early. Ask how fast/expensive the local mail is. Send packages in November.
5	ADAPTATION/ ASSIMILATION TRANSITION – HOLIDAY BLUES	Time to stay focused. You need to get through the period from the end of November until January 1 <sup>st</sup> strong. Don't get hung up with missing the holidays at home. Keep ROTEX in mind here. They will help. The more you contact "home" though, the worse it will be. Tell your host family how you celebrate the holidays.	Keep phone calls and e-mails "home" down.
6	ADAPTATION/ ASSIMILATION	Now for the good stuff. You should feel good speaking the language and you should have made some friends. Make the most of it. From now on, you are on a roll. Hey! Where's my report? Be thinking about return arrangements home.	Rotary tours are coming up! Go on as many as you can.
7	ADAPTATION/ ASSIMILATION	You should be busy now. Friends, school (for most of you) and lots of activities. Don't forget host families (including the first one). Preferred departure dates are due to It's Your World Travel by February 15. March is too late.	<u><b>Make your flight reservations home.</b></u>



8	ASSIMILATION	Are you giving as well as taking? Don't just be doing your own thing. You speak the language and you know some people. You fit in. Use it to help other people. Speak to little kids in schools, volunteer in your community, teach someone English, help with your Rotary Club's projects. This is the part of the roller coaster ride when you get to let go of that safety bar, put your hands in the air and scream as loud as you can. This is "The Monster Hill" of your exchange.	
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9	ASSIMILATION	Are your parents visiting? Plan it out for them. Remember, you are the one who is in charge of their having a good experience. Let them into "your world." Introduce them to your host family, your host Rotary Club, your friends and your town. Let them see you as the mature tour guide, master of the language. They aren't coming? No problem - you have a lot going on. Dig in and make the most of it because this time is fleeting! Hey, don't you owe someone a report?!!	
10	ASSIMILATION & RE-ENTRY ANXIETY	This should be as good as it gets; you love your host country and you are starting to get that dreaded re-entry anxiety. It has to happen, you know that. Don't waste one second wishing it won't. Spend as much time as you can with friends, host families and the people you will miss most. You can spend time with Americans and other exchange students when you get home so spend what little time you have with people who you won't see for a while.	Make time for your host families!
11	ASSIMILATION & RE-ENTRY ANXIETY	Get ready to leave. Make sure that you are not putting off spending time with people. If you want to buy things to take with you, start early. Don't go rushing around the night before you leave. You will be cheating your friends and family out of your time. Leave gracefully. Don't leave a mess. Pay your obligations. Return what you've borrowed. Say "thank you" as many times as you can.	Read "So You Think You're Home Now"
12	RE-ENTRY & REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK	Pack early. Get rid of things that are just clutter. Make sure you have your passport, tickets and that your bank account is closed (if you had one). Exchange money. Don't come home with a lot of foreign money you might not need for a while. Have some local currency with you in case you need it at the airport. Have some U.S. \$ with you for when you land in the U.S. Enough to get a meal or two. Remember, the success of an exchange is measured in the number of tears when you leave; yours and theirs. Smile when you get back to the U.S. Thank your parents for your year. Spend some time with them before you go running around finding your friends. Spend at least two days home before connecting with your friends.	START WORKING ON YOUR ROTARY REBOUND SPEECH.
13	REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK	Get into your new life here. Listen to what you are saying. Are you being critical about "home?" Are you telling everyone you can find about your year or are you keeping it to yourself? Have you referred to your friends as "Those stupid kids?" or "Those stupid Americans" at all? Are you keeping busy or are you moping around the house missing "home?" Was it really easy for you to come back? Do you not miss your host country? Think about why that is so. Get ready for school to start. Make little steps each day to get back into this culture. Talk to ROTEX and to your District and Club Counselors about what you did and what you are doing now. Remember that the deeper you were able to assimilate into your host culture, the longer it will take you to find that "bi-cultural balance"	Contact your Sponsoring Club and offer to do a presentation on your exchange.  Let your District Counselor know what your plans are for the following year. We will invite you to



		between your host country “self” and your American “self.” This is the start of your third year as a RYE!	orientation weekends as a rebound! Help us continue to build the program!
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## Final Departure Checklist

Are You Really Ready To Go?

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Do you have your passport and Visa?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Do you have your travel plans completed? Are your airline tickets for round trip airfare, and do you have an “Open Return” or option to reschedule?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Have you corresponded with your first host family and your host Rotary club? Have you provided them with your complete itinerary and received confirmation that they will be at the airport to pick you up?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Do you have a cell phone that will work in all of the places along your route? Do you have sponsor and host Rotary contacts programmed?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. What language preparations have you made? Do you have a dictionary for your new language? Can you introduce yourself in your new language? Can you ask for directions, pronounce your host family’s name, and ask “Where is the bathroom?” MOST IMPORTANTLY, can you say “Thank you?”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Do you have a photo album with 20-30 good pictures of you, your family, your home, your school, your town, and interesting places you have visited? Have you prepared a hometown presentation?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Have you made arrangements with your parents for transferring money to you, and have you established a budget? Have you become familiar with the monetary system and U.S. \$ exchange rate for your country?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Have you thought about how you will handle the inevitable homesickness and loneliness that you will experience? Do you have a plan for handling family emergencies back home?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Have you selected appropriate gifts for your host families? Do you have some small tokens of appreciation to give those who invite you to their homes or to other events? Do you have thank-you notes or postcards to say “Thank you?”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Do you have your Rotary business cards and your Rotary blazer?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Do you have several Club banners from your Sponsor Rotary Club to present to the Rotary clubs you visit?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Have you done your “homework” on your host country, and have you become familiar with its culture, history, politics, geography, and where it is located?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Have you prepared yourself to ask the most important questions of your new host family upon your arrival in their home?

**If your answers to these questions are “yes” ---- you are ready to go!**



## Packing List

- ✓ Check off each item (set of items) as you pack!
- ✓ Do not put your passport or currency or airline tickets in your checked luggage. Spread your valuables between your carry-on bags and hide them underneath clothes or other items.
- ✓ In your carry-on bag put: your passport, tickets, a toothbrush, and change of underwear (in case your luggage doesn't end up where you do), something to read/listen to on the plane, your Rotary business cards, the name, address, telephone number, etc. of your Rotary contacts in your host country, a small dictionary, a small amount of the local currency, any other items you need for a peaceful flight.
- ✓ Drink lots of water on the plane – avoid sodas and adult beverages. They are dehydrating and also, you shouldn't be consuming adult beverages anyway.
- ✓ Have a fantastic year and don't forget about the people back home!
- ✓ Make sure you leave enough room in your suitcases for things you will bring back at the end of the year. If you take gifts or club banners from home, that will free up space for gifts, banners, school projects, etc. when you return.

\_\_\_\_\_ Rotary Blazer – plan to WEAR IT!

\_\_\_\_\_ 10-14 pairs of underwear, 2-3 bras

\_\_\_\_\_ 7-8 pairs of socks

\_\_\_\_\_ 3-5 pairs of pants, 3 pairs of shorts (be careful where you wear these)

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 nice outfit - slacks, button shirt and tie for the men, and a dress or a skirt/shirt combination for the ladies

\_\_\_\_\_ 2 of whatever you use for sleeping

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 pair of sweatpants, or similar attire - In most countries these are at-home wear only, do not wear them in public until you are sure it is acceptable (the same applies to sandals)

\_\_\_\_\_ 1-2 swimsuits... you never know when you might be going swimming!

\_\_\_\_\_ (for countries with seasons) 3 sweatshirts/sweaters, 1 jacket/coat – warm and **waterproof**

\_\_\_\_\_ 3 pairs of shoes: 1 pair of dress shoes, 1 pair of walking shoes, 1 pair of tennis shoes

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 small overnight pack, we recommend a backpack

\_\_\_\_\_ A small supply of toothpaste, deodorant, makeup, shampoo, toothbrush, etc. These items are readily available even in the most remote place so you do not need a year's supply!

\_\_\_\_\_ skincare items, including sunscreen – what you use may NOT be available

\_\_\_\_\_ laptop or tablet, cell phone, camera, CHARGERS and adapters

\_\_\_\_\_ Journal, a small photo album with pictures of family and friends

\_\_\_\_\_ Gifts



\_\_\_\_\_pins, Rotary business cards, sponsor club banners

\_\_\_\_\_medication, female sanitary products

\_\_\_\_\_Other travel amenities: laundry bag, travel pillow for overnights, stuffed animal, books (not too many)

\_\_\_\_\_Passport, tickets, foreign currency, credit & debit cards, 1 day of clothing IN YOUR CARRY-ON

\_\_\_\_\_A smile! You're on your way!!



## List of Rotary Emergency Contacts as of February 2025

Current list is available at [www.mountainandplainsrye.com/about/country-coordinators](http://www.mountainandplainsrye.com/about/country-coordinators)

### District 5470 Country Coordinators:

#### ASIA (Japan, Taiwan)

Alicia O'Brien

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#### CENTRAL EUROPE (Austria, Germany, Sweden)

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#### EASTERN EUROPE (Poland)

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#### SOUTH AMERICA (Argentina, Colombia)

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#### SOUTH AMERICA (Brazil, Chile)

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### District 5470 Outbound Coordinator

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### District 5470 Rebound Coordinator

Serena Kauffman

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### District 5470 Chair

John Stroud

[jstroud@mountainandplainsrye.com](mailto:jstroud@mountainandplainsrye.com)



