



# Homestay Manual for Families

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Thank you for your interest in being a homestay family with RELA. We are always looking for families who want to make a difference in the lives of our international students and show them the best of Kiwi hospitality. Homestay is a very important part of the New Zealand experience for our students. It is one of the best ways for them to learn first-hand about New Zealand culture and lifestyle. It is also a great way for them to continue improving their English skills outside the classroom. A homestay programme can be a very rewarding experience for everyone involved, and long-lasting friendships often result.

Here are some guidelines to make it easier for you to host students of other cultures. The most important things are to be friendly and sensitive, to communicate well and make the students feel part of the family. The students are away from home, often lonely and faced with customs that are very different from their own.

You will need to have a genuine interest in your students and their culture. Students expect to be more than “boarders” in your home. Mostly, they will want to be a part of your family. We want our students to take home an impression of kindness, friendship and open heartedness.

For your own protection, we suggest that it may be best that males over 18 in the family, including homestay fathers, do not spend time alone with female students.

***Our school has signed the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Students) Code of Practice 2021, a legal requirement for all language schools. The Code is very strict about the care of students and especially those who are under 18. Please read the following carefully and contact us if you have any questions.***

## **After Hours**

The school phone is diverted to an office staff member each night for emergencies. Please only ring the school number after hours if it is absolutely necessary. The best time to ring is 8am–5pm on business days. We prefer to use e-mail for all non-urgent communication, please.

## **Alcohol**

Please take extra care that your students are never in a situation where unsupervised teenage drinking is taking place. Please note that students who are under 18 may not go to licensed premises and drink alcohol. We have a responsibility to be very vigilant where alcohol is concerned.

## **Airport Transfers**

Most of our students arrive into the country via Auckland Airport and most will be transported to your home by shuttle bus. We will e-mail you by the Wednesday the week your student is due to come and tell you the estimated time of arrival. As you can appreciate, things can happen to delay the arrival time. We will try to keep you informed of changes. Also students can be earlier than planned so please try to be home for an hour either side of the estimated time of arrival. It is important you are home to greet your student. First impressions are very important.

In the week of your student's departure, we will again email you by the Wednesday to advise you of the time of the student's pick up. These pickups can sometimes be in the middle of the night. If this is the case, please make sure that your student is up and ready at least 10 minutes before the scheduled arrival of the shuttle. There are often other people catching the same service and they cannot be delayed because someone has slept in.

Please make sure that you see your student's passport before they get on to the shuttle. Leaving a passport in Rotorua can be a very costly mistake!

## **Arrival**

Students arriving in New Zealand have heard of New Zealanders' reputation as hospitable people and are usually very excited and nervous when they first meet you. They are usually also extremely tired and stressed when they first arrive, and will appreciate your patience in this important settling-in period. Please help them to contact home to assure their families that they are fine, as soon as they arrive.

## **Attendance and School Times**

Students must attend all classes on time. RELA classes start promptly at 8.30am. Please help your student to get to school on time. If your student catches a bus, please ensure they know the correct bus to catch to allow them time to walk from the bus stop to our school before 8.30am. The students have a tea break between 10.00 and 10.30 and then classes continue until 12.00. There is then an hour for lunch. Those students who are studying full-time or who have joined our English with Activities programme will have afternoon lessons from 1.00pm–3.00pm. On Fridays, classes finish at 12.00. Students have a choice of joining the whole school activity, doing self-study or having free time on Friday afternoons.

Some activities finish later than 3.00pm. For more information about this see *School Activities* on page 13.

The school closes at 5.00pm. If you are picking your student up, please make sure you have done so before this time.

If your student is sick or late for some reason please make sure they (or you) phone the school office before classes start. Lesson material often depends on student numbers. Continued non-attendance can result in serious consequences including suspension and immigration violations.

***The school is closed on all New Zealand Public Holidays – on these days you will need to provide lunch for your student.***

## **Avoid Negative Comments**

Students are very quick to pick up any critical remarks about the school or the city. Sometimes they will make a critical remark to see if you agree with it or not. Please don't agree. We appreciate your support.

## **Bathroom**

Explain from the outset that there is a limited supply of hot water and that there will be none left for the next person if they use too much. Explain the family routine to them. Tell your students, for example, that when taking a shower they must pull the curtain across and put a bath mat on the floor. Tell them that they should take a short shower. If any problems arise, please talk gently with your student about them.

Our bathrooms usually do not have a drain hole in the floor like bathrooms do in most countries. Many students when they first arrive have no idea that water all over the bathroom floor could be a problem for you.

## **Bedroom**

Please do not feel rejected if your students seem to spend a lot of time in their bedroom with the door shut at the beginning of their stay. It is important to remember that their room may often seem their only haven in the new, foreign and usually unintelligible world that they have entered. Please respect their privacy just as you would wish them to respect your privacy.

New Zealand children are brought up differently from those in other countries and the students may have difficulty dealing with them. Please tell your children, too, to knock and wait to be invited in before they enter the student's bedroom and to never go into the room when the students are not there. Explain to the children that when the students are in their room with the door closed, they are not to be disturbed. Also students' possessions are not to be touched. The student's personal belongings should remain private. Unless your students make it clear that they wish otherwise, try to make the room off limits to your pets.

Misunderstandings over misplaced/lost student possessions can create unpleasant situations and household tensions. Treating your students' room as an area to enter only on invitation will help avoid these. If you find your small child has helped himself or herself to your student's tempting candies or trinkets please explain and apologise to the student. Remember privacy does not extend to students being permitted to entertain members of the opposite sex in their bedroom. Please explain that in New Zealand we entertain in the living areas of the house.

## **Body Clock**

It is normal for Asian and Middle Eastern students to stay up until after midnight every night. They are often surprised when the host family goes to bed early. And they are also often reluctant to wake in the morning. Explain to students that if they stay up late they must not disturb the household and will have to respect this by keeping noise (e.g. music, TV, phone calls) to a minimum.

Our own teenagers may have these sleep patterns too given even the slightest encouragement. It is important to encourage your students to adapt to your lifestyle as soon as possible after their arrival, so do not feel you need to change your usual sleep routine to match theirs. Do not encourage phone calls from family and friends after whatever time is acceptable to your family.

## **Cars**

It is important that we know when our students have purchased vehicles. Please contact school if your students have indicated they will be buying a vehicle. We must ensure all of our students have valid driver licences and know New Zealand road rules. It is also extremely important that our students are not driven around in cars by unqualified and/or inexperienced drivers, whether they are other students or homestay teenagers. Please also ensure that there is never any alcohol involved when students are being transported anywhere.

## **Counselling and Support Staff**

Our school has support staff available on call if any situations arise where your students would like to talk to someone in their native language. Occasionally students receive sad news from home. If this happens, please let us know at once. We can contact a support staff member who is familiar with the grieving processes of the student's culture and who can talk to students in their own language.

## **Cultural Differences Most Often Commented on by Students**

- New Zealanders are casual and informal (we dress casually even when going shopping or out to parties and dinner; we address each other by first name; we visit each other without making appointments etc)
- We consider it impolite to discuss salary, mortgage and age
- We get offended by such comments as 'you have put on weight'; 'his hair is very grey'; 'she is skinny', 'you/he/she looks older'.
- Breakfast (and possibly other meals) are informal and each person in the family often prepares their own.
- The midday meal is not a family meal. Snack-style food or sandwiches are eaten (either at home on the weekends and at school/work during the week)
- The main meal of the day is usually eaten in the evening

- New Zealand food is bland (tasteless) and lacks variety compared with other countries' food.

## **Culture Shock and Homesickness for Students**

These mental states can have dramatic, if temporary, emotional and physical symptoms. There are four stages.

- A period of excitement and eager anticipation.
- A sense of alienation and a need to complain about local customs and people. The signs are tiredness, loneliness, desire for home cooking and old friends, feelings of helplessness and withdrawal, excessive concern over cleanliness, fear for personal safety, irritability and defensive communication.
- A beginning of acceptance and adjustment.
- Full acceptance and increasing confidence.

You can help by

- Giving your students some private time daily. Keep the children away during this time.
- Inviting students from the same country around for an evening. Or make contact with some of the other host families and arrange to entertain each other's students on a reciprocal basis.
- If the problem persists, or is of concern, please get in touch with the school without delay.

## **Culture Shock for Host Parents - Common Reasons:**

- Some students spit often, loudly and publicly.
- Some cultures find using handkerchiefs offensive but sniff merrily.
- We spend a lot of time, effort and money arranging a special holiday away. Our student happily sleeps non-stop while travelling and displays no interest in the scenery we view so eagerly! This pattern is established early in childhood – when in a moving vehicle sleep, sleep, sleep. Do not take it personally.
- Some students may have a different sense of personal hygiene to our own. Some bathe/shower weekly, not daily and spurn deodorant.
- Students may seem to be greater party animals than our own younger generation. For many this is their first taste of freedom to party while others will have come here from large, vibrant cities where the party scene is never-ending.
- Living 24 hours around the clock is new to us and expected by them.
- Students away from the rules and restrictions of their home and country can lose all sense of responsibility.

When teaching your students to live successfully in our society, please underplay the cost factor in any situation. Overuse of the heater/shower/interent is best corrected by showing concern for their welfare or the world's resources rather than your money. Far too many students jump to the conclusion that we are a mean and miserly lot down here in New Zealand.



### **Suggested Explanations**

- Healthier and more natural to dress according to the climate rather than use a heater
- To conserve electricity is to save natural resources and avoid pollution
- Long showers use up our precious water supply
- Talking on the phone long into the night will cause exhaustion from lack of sleep
- Being on the computer all night is bad for eyesight and also unhealthy (lack of sleep)
- Smoke/Vape outside for the sake of the rest of the family or try to cut down for the sake of your own health

If your students feel you are acting in their better interests they are far more likely to co-operate

Please treat your students as you would like yourself, or any junior member of your family, to be treated when far from home.

See Appendix 1 – **Cultural Notes for Homestays** for more information on cultural differences.

### **Family Activities**

Invite your student to family activities and outings. However do not plan an expensive outing just to please your students.

### **Female Students**

Hand your female students a newspaper for wrapping sanitary towels in. At the same time tell them exactly where to leave the wrapped article as they may try to flush it down the toilet.

### **Fire and Earthquake Evacuation Plan**

Please ensure that you go over your fire and earthquake evacuation plan with your students.

- How to dial 111
- Escape routes
- Meeting point outside the house

### **Food**

Some students may have difficulty using cutlery as they are used to chopsticks. Providing a spoon or chopsticks can be a good idea. Also some may become embarrassed if they are asked to choose between one food and another. Just give them what you believe they will like, but explain if they don't like it, don't eat it!

Watch what they don't eat. Please make small snacks, biscuits, and fruit readily available to the students at all times.

Tell the students which meals the family eats together – perhaps dinner but not breakfast or lunch. Another recurring problem is the lack of punctuality for meals shown by many students! There are three main reasons for this; in their own country they will often have eaten alone at a time best suited to their study/daily timetables; New Zealanders eat at an early hour compared to most other countries **or** they are just normal young people who tend to have a blatant disregard for time! Explain the importance of being on time for meals. Ask the students to give you at least 2 hours notice if they are not going to be home for a meal.

Students are often told they should try New Zealand food, so please don't feel that you have to change your menus. However, please be sensitive if it is obvious that students do not like a particular dish – they are often reluctant to say so, and you may have to tell from their expressions! Consider giving rice, noodle or pasta meals as a change from potatoes. Keep some rice and instant noodles in the cupboard and show the students how to cook them. Many students dislike heavy, fatty, oily or sweet meals and ones which are too sweet. "Fatty foods" is a frequently expressed dislike. Some people do not have the enzymes required to digest dairy products so cheese, cream and milk can make them ill.

Most students are used to drinking with meals. Please provide water on the dinner table. If your students would like to cook for you encourage them to do so. It can be fun!

The table manners of your students will differ from those of your family. Your students may make a lot of noise when they eat and drink. If their eating noises get too much for you, gently explain the New Zealand point of view. Slurping and chewing with gusto are often considered signs of enjoyment and appreciation overseas. It is important to understand that there is no right or wrong. It is just a matter of different customs.

## **Gift Giving**

Accept graciously any gift students give you without feeling obliged to reciprocate on the same scale. A small memento would be appreciated, e.g. some home-baked biscuits, or some NZ chocolate, or some photos of the students with your family.

## **Heating**

Some students find New Zealand homes exceptionally cold in winter and some come ill prepared for the cold. Please make sure there is a heater in their bedroom and if you have spare warm clothes, you might like to offer them the use of these. You will need to check that heaters and electric blankets aren't left on all night and day. Some students are not used to heaters and may not know the dangers, e.g. they may put clothes over them to dry or put something too close to a heater. Advise your students that it is inappropriate to have the heater on with the window

open. Another common problem is students who sleep without a blanket but keep the heater on all night for warmth or who will sit up studying in front of a blazing heater but wear only a t-shirt. The biggest problem is in the internationally different habits, it is customary in many other countries to use artificial heat to keep warm whereas we tend to dress according to the temperature.

## **Homestay Payments**

**All Homestays** are paid \$280 per week (18+) and \$310 per week (under 18) per student

**Payments** are made on a per night basis. Therefore, if a student is with you for 6 weeks and 6 nights, that is the time for which you will be paid. Our payments to homestays are made on Fridays, which means that you will see them in your bank account over the weekend or on Monday.

**Direct credit fortnightly** - We understand that very few language schools pay Homestay fees in advance as we do. We are prepared to keep doing this, on the clear understanding that if a student leaves unexpectedly, you will refund RELA for the unused nights.

**Homestay Supervision Fee** – Please note that the school retains a \$10 per week homestay supervision fee from the weekly homestay fee paid by the student.

**Managing Payment Errors** - We do make errors from time to time for which we apologise. If you think you have been underpaid or if you think your payment is overdue, please do not phone at the weekend. Please email [english@rela.co.nz](mailto:english@rela.co.nz).

**Overpayments** - Sometimes money needs to be returned to us e.g. an overpayment or a student leaving early. Unexpected things do happen which may mean that we have to move a student quickly. We do appreciate prompt action when you owe us money.

## **Homework**

Offer to help with their homework. Make sure that they have made an effort themselves first. Do not do their homework for them.

Some students are here for exam courses and need a quiet place to study. Please supply your student with a desk in their bedroom or alternatively in a peaceful place to study away from television and noise.

## **House Chores**

Many students will not be accustomed to doing household chores, especially the male students. It is part of our culture for everyone to help with the chores so don't hesitate to ask them to help wash and dry the dishes, clean the bath after themselves, keep their room tidy and make their own bed. They can also help

prepare meals, set the table and do other light chores if necessary. Treat them as one of the family.

## **House Rules**

Every home has some rules which are observed by the family. Please explain these clearly and simply, e.g. bathroom rules, dishes, using appliances etc. For safety and emergency contact reasons they need to advise you of where they are going, who they are going with and when they will return. They should always give you a telephone number for contact.

Be wary of lists of rules as this may frighten your students. As you get to know your students you can make suggestions and guidelines to help them fit into your family life. Your students will probably want to invite friends into your home. Make your own rules clear. If you write a list, make it friendly –ie: Welcome to our Home – a few things to help you.

## **Insects**

Many newcomers to New Zealand are thoroughly enjoyed as new-found delicacies by mosquitoes or even fleas. Watch your students for welts and scars within a few days of their arrival. There is no need to fumigate the house or feel shame. It's far better to have some insect repellent on hand and some treatment ready to apply to the afflicted areas. Please don't take offence or feel your standards of cleanliness are in question when this happens. Fleas have been known to cross oceans at the smell of new blood! A paste of baking soda and water is also most effective for providing relief from the itch.

## **Insurance**

The school will not be responsible in any circumstances for compensating loss, damage or expenses incurred by students. If a student causes damage, you will have to decide whether to claim on your insurance, or ask the student to pay. Check your insurance cover to see whether you will be compensated for accidental damage by students, eg, to your car or house or furnishings. If the damage is caused by obvious negligence by the student, your insurance company may wish to recover the cost from the student. The student should have insurance which will indemnify him/her against any claims for accidental damage to third party property. However, insurance policies normally don't cover the first \$200-\$1000, the excess. The student may have to pay that amount if the Homestay family asks for payment.

If you intend to make a claim, ensure that you obtain 2 or 3 repair/replacement quotes and a detailed report on what happened, how and when, for forwarding to the insurance company. Claims may take up to 3 months for approval by your insurance company. Any costs incurred prior to approval being received cannot be guaranteed compensation.

## **Internet**

Students expect free wi-fi wherever they go. Please discuss with your student the level of internet access you are able to provide in your home.

## **Key to the Door**

As with your own children/family members – please exercise your personal judgement when deciding whether to give your students their own door key. If you decide not to do so then you will need to ensure you are home when they return from school or social activities.

## **Language**

Speak slowly, using short simple sentences. If you are not understood, re-word the sentence. Don't speak more loudly! Gestures will help too or pictures. If all else fails, write it down. Try to talk to your students as much as possible even though they have difficulties understanding you. They will learn English much faster if you talk to them. But remember that companionable silence can be a relief after struggling all day with English. Use your judgement on this.

You can help them enormously by encouraging them to speak. Don't correct them too often – help them to have the confidence to talk to you comfortably. Tell your students that asking questions is ok.

Some students are reluctant to say "No" for fear of giving offence. Watch for evasive answers which mean "No". Avoid negative questions, e.g. 'Wouldn't you like some more potatoes?' They won't know whether to answer "Yes" or "No". Students will often answer "Yes" when they do not understand. If you tell your student to meet you at 5pm and they say "yes", ask them "What time will you meet me?" Concept checking is very important to understanding.

You may find that your students don't look at you when you are speaking to them. Again, this is a cultural feature. In some societies it is impolite to look at another person while they are speaking to you, especially an older or more important person.

## **Lunches**

You are not responsible for lunches on school days but at weekends and on Public Holidays please ensure that you have food available for your student.

## **Medical**

All students must have medical and travel insurance. If your students need to see a doctor, dentist or optometrist, either help to arrange this for them or tell the school.

Please note that international students are not eligible for New Zealand health services on the same basis as residents. They must pay full costs for the consultation and prescriptions. They need to keep their receipts, so they are able to make an insurance claim. The school will help with the insurance claim, we do not expect you to do this. We take most of our students to Lakes Prime Care.

Please remember that for many of our students who get sick, it will be their first experience of being sick away from their family. Going to a doctor in a foreign country can be an overwhelming experience for them. Please be patient with them and care for them as if they were one of your own family. If you have any concerns, please contact the school.

## **Money Matters**

The payment for Homestay will be made through the school. Please do not accept payment from students. We pay you \$280 per week (18+) and \$310 per week (under 18), fortnightly. In our fees information, it says that the homestay fee "includes \$10 homestay supervision and liaison". You should not need to discuss this with your student.

Please ensure your students do not carry large amounts of cash with them. If your students are staying in New Zealand for a long period, they should open a bank account. If your students need to change currency, show them where they can do this or ask at school. Some money exchange centres need to sight the student's passport when changing large amounts of money. Do not lend your students money or borrow from them.

## **Names**

The students may not know what to call you. You should clarify this on the first day in your home and remind them as often as you need to. Most students will use your first name. It's more friendly and it's easier. Spend some time getting the pronunciation of the student's name correct. Encourage all family members to remember it and use it correctly.

## **Pets**

Your students may be a little shocked to find pets especially dogs living inside the house. New Zealanders love their pets whereas some other cultures may find the idea of animals in the home unacceptable.

## **Problems**

If your students behave in a manner you find irritating or unacceptable, sort this out immediately. Also encourage students to speak to you immediately if there is anything that they do not like. Do not expect students from different cultures to guess what is displeasing you. Encourage communication. Students are often concerned to preserve 'face' – both theirs and yours. This must not be considered to be a lack of openness. You may have to make it clear that your regard for your students is in no way diminished because you have had to point out something that has displeased you – you can explain that this situation has arisen because of a different cultural background. You can always say to the student "this is how we do it in New Zealand". Please remember there is no 'right' and 'wrong' in cultural differences ie: because we do something in a particular way that does not make us right and the student wrong. You will find that most students try very hard to conform. If problems arise please do not hesitate to get in touch with the RELA office. If the problems persist or are severe, it may be necessary to move the students. In spite of your best efforts some misunderstandings are bound to arise. We are here to help you.

## **Punctuality**

Please be on time to meet your students for the first time. The first impression is a lasting impression and it is expected that you are on time. It is also important that if you drop off your students at school, they should be on time for class.

## **Safety**

Without overdoing it, explain carefully about the dangers of our streets after dark. Also explain that we do not carry large amounts of cash – night or day. The 'stranger danger' warning is often needed as it is usual for foreigners in many countries to be treated as honoured guests and total strangers can be relied upon to look after the welfare of a foreigner. Some students can be over cautious in the street yet over-social in the night-club scene. A chat about the existence of party drugs and spiked drinks wouldn't go amiss once your students start to socialise. Help them to understand the need for prudence in all unknown environments.

Traffic and pedestrian rules also need constant reminders. Please demonstrate and explain how to use our roads safely and legally. Always keep in mind that maybe your students come from a country where everyone drives on the 'wrong' side of the road and cars must give way to pedestrians.

If you become aware of traffic infringements or other potentially dangerous behaviour just give us a call so we can help you.

Students need as much information about NZ as possible. In many cases, they know absolutely nothing – their parents have arranged everything and they come with expectations of support and welcome that may not be forthcoming. Students need to maximise their own personal safety, and the safety of their documents. They need

to be constantly warned to not carry large amounts of cash and to lock away their passports and other important papers. They also need to be told to take good care of their bank cards and to safeguard any codes or pin numbers. Students are told it is illegal to buy cigarettes/vapes and to buy or drink alcohol under the age of 18. They are also well aware of the illegality of marijuana and other drugs. Unfortunately, as with so many of our own youngsters, this does not stop them wishing to experiment, or falling prey to spiked drinks.

## **School Activities**

The school has two kinds of activities on offer to our students

1. 1-3pm activities – these are part of our English with Activities programme. Many of our teenagers who come to the school join this programme. The activities are varied and include cultural, sightseeing and adventure activities. Most of the activities return to school by 3pm each day. However, there is the occasional activity which gets back to school after 3pm. Each Monday, the activities students are given a list of the week's activities. This Activity Timetable is also put on our website <http://rela.co.nz/about-rela/english-with-activities/> Please ask to have a look at this as it has the start and finish time if each activity. It also tells if the students need to bring anything special, e.g. togs and a towel, for the activities. You will be told which programme your student is on. However, if you are unsure, please just ring the school office.
2. After school and weekend activities – these are available to all of our students. Weekday activities usually finish by 5pm while the times for the weekend activities vary. Each Thursday, your student will be given a notice about the coming week's activities. New students will be given the notice for the current week on their first day at school. Please ask to see this and ask your student which activities they are interested in joining. This list is also posted on our website each week <https://rela.co.nz/rela-news/weeklynotices/>

Encourage your students to join in school activities and also to make arrangements with school friends for weekend outings. Students don't like to do things by themselves and will rely on you for help in this respect.

Please encourage long-term students to become involved in leisure pursuits which appeal to them and also assist them to make contacts and to join clubs. We teach them about leisure opportunities in afternoon classes but they need personal encouragement.

## **Smoking/Vaping and Drugs**

Let your students know where they can and can't smoke/vape and what to do with the cigarette butts afterwards. Students under 18 should not be smoking. Drug use by students is totally unacceptable.



## **Speaking to Your Students – a few points which would be helpful to us**

Some of our staff are concerned about “pidgin English” and we thought you might like to read some of our thoughts about it.

When you have an overseas student in your home, use the same style of speaking as you use with your friends and family, but slow down!

Often in an effort to communicate with students, we start talking like them, missing out the little words – *the, a, to, she* etc. Students struggling to learn natural speech, may spend hours with grammar books, trying to understand why you said “I go movies” rather than “I’m going to the movies”. They think you are right.

You are probably the people your students listen to most often. You probably don’t realise how carefully they listen to every word. You are their model of natural speech – so just speak naturally. When they don’t understand you the first time, try again, simplifying more and more – if that fails, rephrase the sentence and start again, or write some of it down.

This is not about correct English or perfect English – it is about natural, everyday English, as spoken in New Zealand.

It is important for our students to understand slang, colloquial New Zealand English. If you swear frequently, they will assume this is okay in everyday speech, and they will copy you.

## **Supervision**

It is a requirement of the **Code of Practice for Tertiary and International Students** that we know where our under-18 students are at all times.

- If your students go out, please make sure that they tell you
- who they are going to be with
- where they are going (more precisely than 'into town')
- when they will return.
- how they are getting home

They should take a mobile phone. It should be switched on at all times (unless they are in a place where mobile phones are not allowed). It should have your phone number saved in the memory.

## **Touching**

In many cultures a pat on the back or a friendly touch of the arm in conversation is unacceptable. Some students will accept a hug when they get used to the idea but take care not to offend, especially men. Never touch your student’s head. Warmth and genuine affection are very important in a homestay family, especially for younger students, so feel free to use your discretion about these matters.

## **Transport**

Be prepared to offer transport. This is particularly important at night time when you wouldn't wish your own children to be walking the street. If you cannot, explain that most taxi drivers are safe. Give them the number of a reputable taxi company. If you cannot provide transport to school and your student catches the bus to and from school you must accompany them at least once to show them how and where to get on and off.

If you are picking up your student from school, town or the night market, please make sure you have an agreed place.

## **Washing Clothes**

Either offer to do your students' washing with the family wash and show them the laundry basket, or show them how to work the washing machine and how to dry the clothes. Some students might want to hang their wet underwear in their room. You need to show them where to dry their personal washing without offending their privacy.

## **Weekends**

Advise students about what's on in town. Help with transport may be needed. Please check with the school before taking the students on an outing which may involve a possible injury, such as white-water rafting or bungy jumping. The school will need to check with the agent or the parents first if the student is under 18.

***Enjoy the Experience.*** Opening your home to students provides a wonderful experience for them which they will always remember. We hope that you will enjoy the experience too.

## Appendix 1: Cultural Notes for Homestays

*Please note:*

*The notes are only a summary of some of the main cultural differences you may come across while hosting for RELA. The cultural differences described in these notes are generalisations only and there are many students who don't fit the pattern.*

*We hope the information contained in these notes will be of some help to you.*

*A really good website with a lot of information about different cultures is <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/>*

### **Some Cultural Hints**

Be aware of historical hostilities between different nations. For example: Japanese and Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese, Chinese and Japanese and also in European countries there are many historic rifts. Be sensitive about religious matters.

Most nationalities think that their own culture is superior to others. Showing interest in the culture of others is taken as a compliment.

Avoid giving offence and causing a student to suffer loss of face

In general, don't contradict an opinion offered by a student even though the statements are clearly wrong. Just smile and let it pass or say "Maybe" and move on.

Do not point at the students using your finger. Use the whole hand. Never beckon a student with a crooked finger. In Vietnam for instance, this is how they treat their dogs. If an embarrassing situation does occur, always offer a way out so that face can be saved or quickly change the subject. If the student feels they have suffered a serious loss of face they are likely to be uncooperative and you may see passive resistance.

Westerners usually show embarrassment by downcast eyes, a serious face and a look showing they wished they were elsewhere. In some countries, laughter or smiling is the normal reaction to embarrassment. If they lose face they will also smile in sympathy for your embarrassment. Do not be surprised to see a student smiling more and more as we get angrier and angrier. Laughter is often used to cover embarrassment in an awkward situation. Sometimes they will laugh at mishaps because they feel uncomfortable and not because they are amused. Avoid suffering loss of face yourself. Always control your emotions. Do not raise your voice, display anger or even look really annoyed. They have no respect for you if you can't control yourself. Direct confrontations, arguments, strongly voiced disagreements are regarded as very poor behaviour.

Names are very important. Ask your student what they wish to be called and how to pronounce it correctly.

### **Some cultural habits which cause confusion**

"Yes" does not always mean agreement. It means that they understand what you are saying. This can cause problems.

"No" is a very difficult word for some students to say in response to a request. They may avoid doing so by giving vague answers like "Maybe".

### **Arab Customs and Religious Customs**

- Respect is very important. In an Arab household, when entering a room, it would be traditional for the person to move around others in the room to shake hands.
- A few of the more religious students may prefer not to shake hands with a woman, although most will not have a problem with this. Women should not be offended by this.
- Men will feel uncomfortable sitting on a sofa with a woman who is not an immediate member of their family. They will generally avoid this.
- Some students are not used to being driven by a woman and they may be a bit nervous the first couple of times.
- It is considered impolite to offer something (especially food) with the left hand. The left hand is considered unclean and reserved for hygiene.
- It is considered impolite to point at another person.
- Gifts are not necessary but appreciated. Avoid admiring an item too much, as the Arab student may feel obliged to give it to you. When offered a gift, it is impolite to refuse.

### **Religious Observances**

- In strict terms, a Muslim is required to pray five times a day. The times are set by the rising and setting of the sun. When travelling, this can be reduced to three times a day.
- The most important time is the prayer before sunrise. A student may get up one hour before sunrise to prepare for prayer. Preparation includes a routine of washing the hands, feet and face.
- Students may ask the direction of Mecca. They should be facing Mecca when they pray. This is to the North West. They may also ask about the location of the local Mosque.
- Prayer times vary throughout the country and day-by-day. The best source of prayer times is the FIANZ website – see [www.fianz.co.nz](http://www.fianz.co.nz).
- Friday is the main religious day and a day of rest. Students may go to the mosque between 11.30 and 1.30 on that day, and often they will eat with their friends afterwards.

- Ramadan is a month of fasting in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which depends on the sighting of the new moon. Ramadan moves around the seasons. Students can eat before sunrise and break their fast at sunset. You may need to leave some food available if you have Arabic students with you during this time.

### **Arab people, values and beliefs**

- For Arab people, the family is very important. Large families are not uncommon. The families are patriarchal. Respect for parents, especially the word of the father, is very important. Sometimes they don't like you to ask about the family, especially the female members, and they never speak disparagingly of their families.
- It is important to behave at all times in a way that will create a good impression on others.
- Criticism needs to be handled delicately. It should be indirect and include praise of any good points first, accompanied by assurances of high regard for the individual. To preserve the person's dignity, avoid criticism in front of others.
- People, and helping people, are more important than rules.
- A promise made has its own value but people can't always be held responsible for actual follow-through. Maybe there were factors beyond their control.
- Stated times are flexible.
- How you say something is as important as what you say. If you speak softly and make your statements only once, Arabs may wonder if you really mean what you are saying.
- The ability to speak well and at length is an important skill.

### **A few more hints**

The students will invariably have had much less practice in speaking English than in reading and writing. So be patient, use short sentences, speak a little more slowly than usual and avoid slang. If not understood, rephrase rather than repeat it and don't raise your voice to stress key words. They respond well to praise and to feelings of goodwill, friendliness and helpfulness from their teachers and homestays. The key to success is to develop close personal relationships if possible. They are usually hard working, always polite, friendly and cheerful. If they decide they like you, you will be overwhelmed with warm smiles and sometimes shy confidences.

The long-term students who come to RELA suffer from a feeling of loss. Loss of family, of their group, their language and culture and even their name. There is a need for all RELA staff and homestays to be warm and supportive to these students and to give them a feeling of belonging to the RELA family that includes the teachers, staff and homestay families.

