

# Friendship Family Handbook



Student Edition

## What is the Friendship Family Program?

The Friendship Family Program at USI exists to promote cross-cultural understanding and awareness by matching international students at USI with a host family in the USI community. This serves the dual purpose of helping students adjust and learn about American culture, as well as introducing the friendship

family to other cultures. The friendship family provides a warm, supportive environment that fosters a mutual exchange of cultures and a respect of cultural differences. The program helps students build a support system while they are away from their home countries.

### Responsibilities & Expectations of the Students:

Students are expected to maintain consistent communication with their friendship family. Students should NOT ask their families for financial support, nor should students ask to live with their families. If, for any reason, you are no longer able to participate in the program, please inform Nicole Vernon.

## What are the expectations and commitments of being a Friendship Family?

The time commitment does not need to be great and mainly depends on your schedule and your family's schedule. You can meet once a week, once a month, or a few times a semester on campus or off campus. We do ask that families at least initiate contact with you on a regu-

lar basis, even just a simple phone call, text, or email message, to let them know they are thinking about you. You can also contact your family. You do not need to wait to hear from them.

### The friendship family is not responsible for:

- Homestays
- Money matters
- Immigration regulations, visas, work permits, etc.
- Academic counseling or class attendance
- Registration procedures and payment of tuition

## Who Can Join?

### **Families:**

The program is open to all USI faculty and staff. We also ask that you approach this relationship with an open mind and heart.

*Families could include:*

Married couple

Unmarried couples

Single person

Family with children

Same-sex couple

Families of any religion

Families originally from the U.S.

Families originally from other countries

Anyone over the age of 18 who wants to befriend an international student

### **Students:**

Any international student at USI can join the program. This includes students living on campus, as well as single students, married students, and students with children.



## How to Apply

### Students:

Complete a Friendship Student application. Once USI has your completed application, you are ready to be matched.





## STUDENTS: CONVERSATION STARTERS

Starting a conversation with someone from a different country can be a little overwhelming! You might be scared, nervous, unsure of appropriateness, or afraid of accidentally offending. We have provided the following list of conversation starters that can help. One of the purposes of the Friendship Family Program is for you and your friendship family to learn about each other's cultures, so ask away! The best way to learn is to ask! Don't be afraid to ask specific questions about U.S. culture.





## Interests and Hobbies

- What do you do in your spare time?
- What are your favorite movies, books, sports, and types of music?
- Are you involved in any campus clubs or organizations?

## Goals and Aspirations

- What would you like to accomplish in your lifetime?
- What career would you like to pursue? Why?

## Family

- What is your role in your family?
- What kinds of activities do families do together in your culture?
- Do you have any siblings?
- Do you have a boyfriend or girlfriend? Husband or wife? Children?

## Food

- What kinds of food do you like to eat?
- Is food an important part of your culture?

## Relationships

- How do you define “friend?”
- What activities do you do with your friends in America?

## Experience

- What are some experiences or events that have made a big impact on your life?
- Can you help me with finding information or resources?
- What are some things that are unique about living in America?
- How do you celebrate holidays in your culture?
- Do you speak any other languages besides English?

## STUDENTS: ACTIVITY IDEAS

Expand your experience in America by trying new things with your friendship family! Look for ways to introduce them to your culture, and feel free to suggest things you would like to do together.

*Here are some ideas:*

- Invite them to your home for dinner or other activities, such as movie nights, play board games, etc.
- Celebrate holidays
- Attend sport events
- Attend local festivals
- Celebrate birthdays
- Meet them for coffee or lunch on campus
- Attend campus activities together
- Visit local tourist attractions
- Outdoor activities

There is no financial obligation to be a Friendship Family. If you attend an event that costs money or go out to dinner, it is you and your family's choice if you will pay any fees or costs associated with the planned activity. You may want to establish a precedent when you first meet.





# Culture Shock

This may be your first time to the United States - Welcome! You have left the comfort of your home to begin an exciting and, sometimes, overwhelming journey. When you first arrive, you may face challenges adjusting to American culture. You may experience **culture shock**, which is a feeling of disorientation or confusion that often occurs when a person leaves a familiar place and moves to an unfamiliar place and moves to an unfamiliar one. When you arrive in Evans-

ville, you will likely experience a multitude of different things: buildings, stores, food, and even smells.

You may encounter a language barrier, which might make it hard to express your wants, needs, and personality to Americans. This can cause feelings of discomfort and isolation, and you may even begin to doubt your decision to come to America. *This is normal.* It's also important to remember that some students are more affected by culture shock than others.

## Symptoms of Culture Shock

Nervousness	Depression	Irritability
Anxiety	Loneliness	Loss of Appetite
Fatigue	Physical Illness	Lethargy
Lack of Sleep	Uneasiness	Insomnia
Frustration	Homesickness	Headaches
Anger	Unhappiness	Self Doubt



## What to Do

- Find other people to interact with. Focusing on someone outside of yourself can help relieve feelings of discomfort and loneliness.
- Surround yourself with familiar things from home (food, music, TV shows, etc.)
- Slow down and relax to allow your emotions to catch up
- Develop daily patterns and routines to increase your sense of familiarity.
- Call or Skype friends and family in your home country
- Express yourself! It is okay to laugh, cry, sing, pray, draw, etc.
- Find ways to practice your English skills
- Express how you are feeling to your friends, family, and host family. If they know you are experiencing culture shock, they can help you.
- Be patient with yourself by eating well, getting enough rest, and exercising to prevent physical illness or exhaustion
- If difficulties persist, seek counseling at USI Counseling Center. This is a great service, and it is free for students. You don't have a mental illness to get counseling, and many people in America seek counseling for help with adjustment or difficult life circumstances.

## Seven Lessons Toward Cross-Cultural Understanding

Communicating with someone from a different culture can bring about feelings of nervousness and apprehensiveness. You may wonder what you should or should not talk about, what activities are acceptable to do together and how to begin a conversation. These seven steps can help!

Step 1	Don't assume everyone is the same.
Step 2	Don't assume behaviors mean the same thing in every culture. For example, giving someone a "thumbs up" in America indicates approval, but in other countries, the gesture is insulting.
Step 3	Don't assume that what you think is "normal behavior" is normal in every culture. A lot of behavior is universal, but certainly not all of it!
Step 4	Don't assume that what you meant is what was understood. Check for signs like body language or facial expressions to ensure the other person understood you correctly.
Step 5	Don't assume that you understand what the student meant. You hear others' words through the medium of your own culture. You know what those words mean to you, but they may mean something different to the person speaking them.
Step 6	You don't have to like "different" behavior, but understanding where it comes from may help you respond more sensitively.
Step 7	Most people do behave rationally; you just have to discover the rationale!

## STUDENTS: THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

### *Language*

Don't be afraid to ask a question or ask your family to repeat something.

### *Religion*

Religion is an important part of American culture for some families, so your friendship family may invite you to religious activities as a way of experiencing American culture. You can feel free to attend if you want to, but are not obligated. If you do not want to attend, just politely decline the invitation. If you feel pressured to attend after declining, please contact the Center for International Programs.

### *Timeliness*

In America, people expect you to arrive for a meeting at the time you agreed upon, and it is considered rude to arrive late. Arriving 5-10 minutes early is usually considered polite. Keep this in mind when scheduling meeting times with your friendship family. Try to be respectful of them and arrive at the designated time you scheduled with them.

### *Gifts*

While in some cultures it is considered polite to refuse an offer 2 or 3 times before accepting it, it is fine to accept an offer the first time in America. If your friendship family offers a gift/food/refreshment/etc., you can say yes the first time. They usually will not offer again. You can also give your family a gift if you would like. You may want to tell them about how gifts are accepted/given in your culture so they can learn something new.

### *Paying*

Your friendship family is not expected to pay for your meal or ticket if you attend an event together, so you should plan on paying for things yourself. However, if your family offers to pay for your meal or ticket, it is fine to accept their offer. Your friendship family should establish this before you go to your activity or event.



## *Pets*

Many American families have pets. If you are not used to pets, ask your friendship family for tips on how to handle their pet, and approach their pets slowly. If you are scared of their pet, let them know! They will respect that and may be able to keep their pet in another room while you are visiting.



## Students: Frequently Asked Questions

### **How do I go about contacting my family for the first time?**

Once a match has been made, the Program Coordinator will send you the family's contact information in an email. Your family has been asked to contact you first, but you can send them an email, explain who you are, and express your interest in meeting with them. If you have any problems making contact, please inform the Program Coordinator as soon as possible so they can help!

### **Can I recommend activities to do with my friendship family?**

Yes! Invite your friendship family to activities that interest you. This could include movies, concerts, plays, etc or any activities you are involved in on campus.

### **What if I set a time to meet with my friendship family and they cancel?**

Ask again! Don't give up after the first attempt, but continue to invite them to meet with you.

### **What if my friendship family continually cancels or does not respond to me?**

Please contact the Program Coordinator so they can help. If the Program Coordinator is unable to resolve the issue, we will happily match you with a new family. We want you to benefit from this program!

### **How often do I meet with my friendship family?**

As much as your schedule and your family's schedule allows, but we ask you contact them at least once a month.

### **Does I live with my friendship family?**

No, you do not live with your friendship family, nor do they provide any financial assistance to you.

### **Is my familys responsible for providing transportation if I need it?**

No. You may ask your friendship family to take your somewhere, but they are not required to say yes.

### **What other ways can I communicate with my friendship family?**

Yes! We actually encourage this as it can relieve some of the awkwardness as you first get to know each other.

### **Can I have more than one friendship family at the same time?**

No. We do not have enough families in the program for students to be matched with more than one family at the same time. However, if your original match does not work out, we are willing to match you with a new family.

### **What if I no longer wish to participate in the program?**

That's okay, this is a voluntary program! Just let us know that you would like to withdraw from the program so they can match your student with a new family.

### **What if I have a question or concern about my family?**

Email Nicole Vernon at [nmvernon@usi.edu](mailto:nmvernon@usi.edu) or call at 812-228-5092. We welcome any and all questions, and we would love to assist you!



## Contact Us

The Friendship Family Program would like to thank you for your participation! The program has been very beneficial to many students and families over the years and we hope this continues.

Feel free to email Nicole with suggestions for program improvement or to share any comments or concerns you may have. We want you to get the best experience for our program.

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Adapted from Ball State University Friendship Family Handbook: no longer available online; Hampshire College International Friends and Family Program: Retrieved from <https://www.bsu.edu/-/media/www/departamentalcontent/rinkercenter/friendship/ff%20handbook%20-%20student%20edition%202019.pdf?la=en&hash=07C410E422DB90CF265562DEFC847F1B0724F05F>