

Friendship Family Handbook



Family 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, a student is no longer able to participate in the program, please inform the 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, your family's schedule, and the student'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 you at least initiate contact

with your student on a regular basis, even just a simple phone call, text, or email message, to let them know you are thinking about them. Often students may stop contact if they feel their family is too busy as they don't want to be considered a burden or bothersome to their family.

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

FAMILIES: 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 student to learn about each other's cultures, so please use this guide or ask any questions you may have. The best way to learn is to ask!



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?
- What goals do you have in America?

Education and Work

- What is your major?
- What is your favorite subject?
- Do you currently work?
- What is your favorite part of your job?

Food

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

Relationships

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

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?

Experience

- How do you feel about being away from home? What do you miss most?
- Do you need help finding information or resources?
- What are some differences that you have found between your home and America?
- How do you celebrate holidays in your culture?
- Is there anything you want to do or see in the U.S.?

FAMILIES: ACTIVITY IDEAS

Expand your student's experience in America by discovering their interests and introducing them to new things!

Here are some ideas:

- Invite them to your home for dinner or other family 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
- Attend their activities
- Visit local tourist attractions
- Outdoor activities

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





Culture Shock

In many cases, this is the first time our international students have been to the United States. They have left the comfort of their homes to begin an exciting and overwhelming journey. When they first arrive, they may face challenges adjusting to American culture. They 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 one. When your student

arrives in Evansville, they will likely experience a multitude of different things: buildings, stores, nature, food, and even smells.

If students are not proficient in English, it might be hard to express their wants, needs, and personalities to Americans. This can result in feelings of discomfort and isolation, leading them to withdraw or even doubt their decision to come to America. Some students may be 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



Ways to Help Culture Shock

If your student seems to be experiencing culture shock, here are a few suggestions you can offer them:

- Encourage students to interact with others. Focusing on someone outside of themselves can help relieve feelings of discomfort and loneliness.
- Suggest that they surround themselves with familiar things from home (food, music, TV shows, etc.).
- Help them slow down and relax to allow their emotions to catch up with the newness around them.
- Help them develop patterns and daily routines.
- Encourage them to call or Skype friends and family in their home country.
- Encourage them to express themselves! Let them know it is okay to laugh, cry, sing, pray, draw, etc.
- Practice English skills together.
- Let them know that you want to be a support and are open to talking through anything with them.
- Encourage students to be patient, and assure them that culture shock does eventually pass.
- Encourage students to care for themselves by eating well, getting enough rest, and exercising to prevent physical illness for exhaustion.

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!

FAMILIES: THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Language

Many friendship family students are enrolled in the Intensive English Program (IEP) and may still be learning English. Many of them are hoping to practice English with their friendship family. Don't let language barriers scare you with lots of practice it will get easier. Try to speak slowly and clearly and don't be afraid to ask your student directly if they understand.

Religion

Religion is an important part of American culture for some families. It is okay to invite your student to religious activities as a way of experiencing American culture. Just be sure to clearly state the nature of the event, and allow your student to choose whether or not they wish to participate. USI supports religious freedom and we require the same for our families. We have the right to terminate a relationship between a student and their family.

Timeliness

Many cultures do not value timeliness the same way the U.S. does! Keep this in mind when meeting with your student. Don't be surprised if they are late and don't interpret it as a sign of disrespect.

Gifts

If you offer a gift/food/refreshments/etc. to your student and they refuse the first time, you may want to offer a few more times. In some cultures, it is considered polite to refuse an offer 2 or 3 times before accepting. A student may offer you and your family a gift as well to show their appreciation.

Pets

Some international students may not be used to having pets. Be sure to introduce your pets slowly, and give students tips on how to handle your pet. If a student is not comfortable around your pet, please respect that. We will let a student know about any pets you have and try not to match a student if they cannot be around pets.



Families: Frequently Asked Questions

How do I go about contacting my student for the first time?

Once you receive your student's information via email, contact them as soon as possible. Explain who you are and express your interest in meeting them. If you have any problems making contact, please inform us as soon as possible so that we can help. We will also send the student your contact information so they will have it.

What if I invite my student and he/she declines the invitation?

Ask again! It is important to remember that your student's primary responsibility is to their academic studies and may be very busy. Don't give up after the first attempt, but continue to invite them to meet with you.

What if my student continually declines or does not respond my invitations?

Please contact CIP so they can help. We will also contact the student and if we cannot resolve this we can try to match you with a new student.

How often do I meet with student(s)?

As often as you schedule and the student's schedule allows, we ask that you at least keep communication with your student once a month if you cannot meet frequently.

Am I responsible for providing transportation for the student?

No. It is okay to provide your student with transportation, but it is not required. If your student does not have transportation, you will need to take that into consideration when planning activities.

Does my student live with me?

No, they do not live with you, nor do you provide any financial assistance.

What other ways can I communicate with my student?

Call, text, email, social media, whatsapp, etc. These are great ways to check in with your student between meetings.

Can I host multiple students at a time?

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

If I host more than one student, do all of our activities have to include each student?

No. Some students may like different activities, so you may prefer not to do every activity together. That is up to you and your students!

What do I do if there is an emergency with my student?

If it is a serious emergency, please call 911. During orientation, students are provided with local emergency phone numbers, but feel free to go over these with them to check their understanding. Each student is required to have health insurance, so this should be of no concern.

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 student?

Email Nicole Vernon 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.

Address:

University of Southern Indiana
8600 University Boulevard
Evansville, Indiana 47712

Email:

nmvernon@usi.edu

Phone:

812-228-5092

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-%20family%20edition%202019.pdf?la=en&hash=821BB5D6C-C606F878EAB4682F590FDA8FA85EFE8>