



Be Yourself

First of all, be yourself. This is not a job or task with a right and wrong way of acting. The AFS exchange is a chance for you and the student to learn, share, and grow. It will of course require a little more patience than if you were making friends at school; for one thing, the student lives with you. If you start out trying to impress the student, you will find later that it is more difficult to be yourself. Your new brother or sister expects you to be you, just as he or she wants to be himself or herself. So relax and be honest with each other. This is how the best friendships begin.

Be a Brother or Sister

“Show the student the ropes. It is actually quite frightening to not know anyone... Take them places, spend time together with him and your parents, but also give the exchange student his quiet time and privacy.”

Kyle from South Africa

Try to think of the AFS Student as a new brother or sister. This does not mean that you are expected to become constant companions or have the same friends. You will have your own personality differences and varied interests just like you have with other brothers and sisters. You may often enjoy each other's company and sometimes pursue individual interests. If your parents seem to spend too much time with the new brother or sister, it is because they want him or her to be as comfortable in their home as you are. You can help with a little patience and understanding and always by lending a hand.

Don't let the daily differences cloud the overall importance of a good relationship between all the members of the family. Above all, try to be open with everyone in your family and share how you feel so misunderstandings and differences can be quickly overcome, before they get out of hand.

“I've learned a lot about the way other people act and live. My hardest adjustment was having someone else get all the attention around the house. But I've learned a lot about living with people other than my family and I've really enjoyed having a sister.”

Paul, host brother in Kansas

Be a Friend

“Through Janet I have built new friendships with people she has come to know and she has made friends with people whom I know. I have enjoyed her company, her funny British accent, her quiet times, and her not-so-quiet times. It has all been meaningful to me because of our friendship.”

Carol, host sister in Iowa

Beyond your role as a host brother or sister you will want to become friends with the student. This will make living together easier and give you a better understanding of the student and you. Like all friendships it will take time and a lot of shared experiences before you are comfortable with each other and have learned each other's strengths and weaknesses. This requires patience, tolerance, acceptance, and flexibility. The results will be worth it. When the experience is over and the student has returned home, your friendship will still be there along with the satisfaction that you have reached across a great distance to understand another person.

Be a Guide

“Be open to the exchange student. Try to understand that it is hard to get used to other customs. They need help in understanding how everything works here.”

Federica from Italy

The AFS Student is not a guest in your house but a member of the family. To feel “at home” however, he or she needs to be able to find his or her way around and to know where and how things are done. You can help the AFS student a lot by introducing him or her to people in the neighborhood and community and by being a guide to important places around the house, the school, and the community. During this time you may discover new things about your environment which you took for granted or never saw before. By discovering this new perspective you are, like the AFS Student, discovering something new about your world.

“Remember that they are 1000's of miles away, in a totally new environment, and may not always be up to doing some things. You might need to encourage them.”

Caitlin, host sister in New York

Be a Language Teacher

“Spend some time helping your exchange student learn English.”

Yu from Japan

For some AFS Students English is not their native language. They will not of course speak as quickly or confidently as you do. Sometimes when they are tired or nervous their ability to communicate in English will be slowed down. By showing an awareness of this and by having a little patience you can further help the student adjust, as well as demonstrate your ability to perceive and respond to the needs of other people. Following are several things that will help you build a good rapport with your new brother or sister:

- speak slowly, using short simple sentences
- make sure rule, dates, and other important information is understood
- repeat important information – repetition will help the students absorb the important things because he or she is familiar with them
- try to become a good listener

Continued...

We all like for others to listen to us as we try to communicate; it is only polite to give the AFS Student the opportunity to ask questions and try out his or her new language. Correct only the most important things at first, don't worry about good grammar or complete sentences as much as just encouraging the student to talk and look for words to express feelings or needs. In the process, you might learn some of his or her language. The thought of learning an entirely new language can be frightening (imagine trying to learn yourself!), so give the student a little praise now and then. It will work wonders.

Relationships and Rewards

There is no formula for your relationships with your AFS Brother or Sister—each interaction between two people is special. It's often a matter of chemistry; the mixture of temperaments, personalities, interests, environment, as well as cultural differences. A willingness to see another point of view, to compromise, and overcome minor irritations will help establish good communication.

Closeness, sharing, fun, and fellowship are among the many possibilities in your AFS relationship, just as there are differences of opinion, petty annoyances, misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and competitiveness. Sometimes your expectations of friendship are fulfilled and sometimes they may not be, but accepting and respecting each other's individuality will be a tremendous learning experience.

Making Your Own Adjustments

"I've never had a sister before which means I've never had to share my room and belongings, my privacy, my mom and dad. It's difficult to see how one could love a person you've never known before, yet how could I help but love my sister and her actions. Through this love I've learned patience, trying to explain things. The biggest adjustment I had to make was sharing my parents, for when Minh came she needed extra love at the beginning. I wouldn't trade this sharing experience for anything else in the world."

Jennifer, host sister in Oklahoma

During your AFS experience, it is natural for you or your host sibling to want to speak frankly with someone outside the home who understands AFS and the unique challenges that accompany the hosting experience. AFS Volunteers can provide an objective and informed point of view, and they are willing to listen and help both you and your participant. To this end, each participant and host family is assigned a local volunteer or "liaison." Throughout the exchange, your AFS Liaison will initiate separate contact with you and your host sibling each month. It is important to remember however, that you needn't wait for your liaison to contact you. In fact, we urge you to ask for assistance at any time, before difficulties and misunderstandings become too serious to be resolved. In many cases, small but persistent problems can be prevented from undermining an entire relationship if an AFS Volunteer talks separately with the participant and family. Mediation by a neutral third party often helps each side to better understand the other's point of view. And that is at the heart of the AFS mission.

Often, it is helpful to talk over your problems with another person. Your local Chapter has a Student/Family Liaison for this purpose. Whomever you choose to talk with, you deserve a great deal of credit and thanks for your efforts to work through any difficulties which may arise. Learning to understand yourself as well as others is all part of the AFS experience.

Gaining a New Perspective

"Some of the benefits of being a host sister are that you get to meet a whole bunch of new people who can be resources to help you figure out a problem...and this way you learn to function better in society because you can see more than one point of view. It also helps you to learn to deal with the unexpected."

Caitlin, host sister in New York

The AFS experience gives you an opportunity for a new perspective on values, problems, and goals. You may gain new insights into your way of living or into the everyday world. As a host brother or sister, you can have all of this around you—you do not have to leave home in order to have an AFS adventure in sharing, learning, and fun.

AFS Info Center, 506 SW Sixth Avenue, 2nd Floor,
Portland, Oregon 97204
1-800-AFS-INFO
www.afs.org/usa

Straight Talk

for AFS

Brothers & Sisters



AFS is a worldwide family; its members include local volunteers, school club members, natural families, and hosting families. As a host brother or sister you play an important role in the experience of the AFS student who shares your family's life for a semester or a year.

Sharing your home with another student is an adventure with the potential for your own personal growth, the chance to make a friend for life in another country, and to have a lot of fun. Although there are no guarantees that everything will go smoothly and without problems, there are some things you can do to make sure you and your new brother or sister have every opportunity to make the most of this experience. By trying to understand another person's position or method of action, you are beginning to understand more about others and yourself. Here are some tips:

Continued...