



How to Interview Host Families for AFS Programs



The Purpose of the Interview

The purpose of the interview is different for the host family than for the interviewer. For the interviewer, in accordance with U.S. Department of State guidelines, the primary purpose is to assess whether the family is suitable to host. This includes viewing and assessing the physical environment in the home, including where the participant would sleep and study. For the family, the primary purpose is to determine whether they would like to host, given the additional information provided to them during the interview regarding their role and responsibilities as an AFS Host Family.

Approaching the interview in this way, and describing it to the family as such, allows both the interviewer and the host family a graceful exit should either decide that the hosting experience is not meant for the family at this time.

As a result of the interview family members will also:

- identify what would be expected of them as an AFS Host Family and what AFS expects of participants;
- become familiar with the support available AFS Host Families and Participants at the local, national, and regional level;
- explore issues that may impact or influence the placement of a participant in their home such as smoking, dietary issues, and pets;
- reflect on their expectations of what the hosting experience might entail;
- receive answers to questions about their potential experience as an AFS Host Family.

The interview process will also allow the interviewer to determine what type of participant would be the best match for this family.

Sensitive information may be shared during the interview or on Form C of the host family application and it is expected that this information be kept confidential.

The Interview Process

Prior to the interview, provide the family with general information about the history and mission of AFS and a *Host Family Application*.

Preparing for the Interview:

1. Call and set the appointment
2. Ensure all family members will be present for the interview
3. Outline expectations of interview & approximate time the interview will take
4. Let the family know you will be asking for a tour of the home and to see the hosted student's room and sleeping arrangements for the coming year.

Conducting a Successful Interview

Successful host family interviews allow for a great deal of listening as well as talking. It's important to strike a balance between educating the family about the AFS hosting experience, and listening to the family talk about themselves, their lifestyle, and expectations. Every effort should be made to ensure that all family members are present, have a chance to express themselves, and respond to your questions.

Successful interviews can be achieved by:

- conveying warmth, openness, and honesty;
- behaving in a respectful way toward all family members;
- avoiding the use of AFS jargon such as abbreviations or placement statuses;
- asking clarifying questions related to the application as necessary;
- including 2 volunteers in the interview – one to facilitate and one to observe family members and take notes.

Characteristics of Successful Host Families

While possessing these qualities, skills, or attitudes alone will not ensure a successful hosting experience, a family who does embody them is much more likely to experience a positive intercultural exchange.

- An open mind and ability to communicate effectively
- Honesty, flexibility, and transparency in family dynamics
- A sense of humor, curiosity, warmth, and expression of feeling among family members
- Evidence of family unity. Hosting a student is challenging and a strong family is better equipped to deal with the difficult moments
- Family makes an effort to "put on their best face." If not, one might question how much effort they will put into the hosting experience.
- Willingness to make this a true mutual intercultural exchange
- A strong desire to make the participant a member of the family

Some Topics to Highlight

During the course of the interview (perhaps when reviewing the *Host Family Agreement*) you may want to briefly cover the following topics and/or refer to the *Host Family Handbook* where additional information can be found. This will aid the family in their own decision making process.

- AFS Medical Plan
- AFS Support System
- Finances – Who pays for what?
- Tentative dates or date range for required Host Family Pre-Arrival Orientation (and emphasize the requirement that family must attend)
- Tentative dates or date range for orientations and AFS Events in which participants are required/invited to participate
- Role of liaison and requirement for monthly contact
- Criminal background check requirement

Suggested Interview Techniques

- Begin the interview with easy questions and progress to more serious topics (see suggested questions below).
- Ask the family to conduct the *Host Family Self Assessment* (see AFS Online), a fun way to start the interview and observe family members' communication styles and interpersonal dynamics.
- For families with children, pose many of the questions to children and ask parents for their input second (sample on AFS Online).
- Bring a copy of the *Host Family Handbook* to refer to during the interview.
- Bring a digital camera to take pictures of the family should they not have appropriate ones in hand for the application.
- Briefly review the *Host Family Agreement* or make sure that all related topics are touched upon during the interview.
- Provide "homework" for the family for the period between the interview and the Host Family Pre-Arrival Orientation (see AFS Online).
- Ask open-ended questions that will allow the family to talk spontaneously about a variety of issues.
- Use specific examples to illustrate how AFS and other Host Families have dealt with issues related to the hosting experience
- Bring AFS memorabilia or DVDs to generate enthusiasm such as yearbooks, AFS scrapbooks, etc.

Suggested Interview Questions

- Who initiated the idea of hosting and why?
- Who will live in the home during the time the AFS hosting experience?
- May I see where will the participant sleep? Will s/he share a room? With whom?
- What are the family's intellectual, physical and cultural interests? Are they pursued individually or by the family as a whole? How often? What expectations does the family have of the AFS participant in regard to these interests?
- How would the family accommodate interests that the participant might have that are different than those of the family?
- How is transportation to school and activities handled? How would the family and their network of friends help the AFS participant with transportation to activities?
- What are the family's rules regarding computer and telephone use? Would the family be able to provide a functioning phone in the home at all times?
- How are family decisions made? To what extent do the children of the family share in the decision making? How might the family handle a child who comes from a family and/or culture where this is handled quite differently?
- What are specific examples of rules and expectations that the parents choose for teenagers? For those host families with no children or younger children, how will they determine what are appropriate expectations for teenagers? (Refer to section on Teens in *Host Family Handbook*.)
- How much flexibility would there be in accommodating a participant who is accustomed to greater independence and decision making? Would the family feel comfortable discussing these issues openly with their hosted participant?
- How is conflict or disagreement dealt with in the family? How do they resolve problems?

- What is the family's religious affiliation, if any? What role does religion play in their daily lives? To what extent will they want/expect an AFSer to take part in their religious practice? How would the family feel about hosting a student with a different or no religious affiliation?
- Are there any unusual circumstances in the family which are currently present or anticipated to occur during the AFS experience, such as illness, unemployment, or severe changes in economic status?

Indicators that the family may not be suitable to host at this time:


- Division between the family members about whether to host.
- One or more family members absent from the interview.
- One family members does all of the talking during the interview.
- Inability to spend enough time with a host participant due to work schedule or other commitments.
- A family who is not social or involved in the community.
- Unrealistic expectations of what hosting an exchange participant means for example, best friend, language tutor, baby-sitter for their child, or companion for an elderly family member.
- Very specific requests and expectations about the participant that they would like host i.e. *"A 17 year old Swedish girl who has younger siblings, excels academically, likes horseback riding and cooking."*
- Inappropriate comments made during the host family interview, for example that demonstrate intolerance towards a specific race, culture, or religion.
- Family is unable to provide own bed for participant.
- The home is unsafe or unsanitary.
- Evidence of substantial rigidity and/or a lack of a sense of humor among family members.
- An unsuccessful hosting experience with another exchange organization or with AFS in the past.
- Refusal to conduct criminal background check or comply with any Department of State requirements.

**A family that is not suitable to host, does not necessarily prevent them from being active with AFS.



For more information about conducting host family interviews and related resources mentioned above, please refer to "Your Passport to Hosting" in section 02.Manuals/Volunteer Learning Guides/Hosting in the AFS Online Library at www.afsonline.org or contact your Area Team Hosting Coordinator or Regional Service Center hosting staff.

Office contact details for AFS-USA



AFS
Intercultural Programs USA

Call 1-800-876-2377

to reach the **Regional Service Center** nearest you

Admissions Center	506 SW 6th 2nd Floor Portland OR 97204 Phone (800) AFS-INFO Fax (503) 229-0753
Central Regional Service Center	2356 University Avenue West, Suite 424 St. Paul, MN 55114 Phone (651) 647-6337 Fax (651) 647-6628
Eastern Regional Service Center	231 E. Baltimore Street, 15 th Floor Baltimore, MD Phone (410) 539 5997 Fax (410) 539-5636
Western Regional Service Center	506 SW 6th 2nd Floor Portland, OR 97204 Phone (503) 241-1578 Fax (503) 241-1653
National Service Center	One Whitehall, 2 nd Floor New York, NY 10004 Phone (800) 876-2376 Fax (212) 299-9090