



2011-2012  
Participant Handbook

**Ayusa**



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# Welcome to the Ayusa Program

Dear Ayusa Student, Host Family, and High School Teachers & Staff,

Ayusa Global Youth Exchange is proud to be the sponsor of your program. We believe that high school exchange gives students an excellent opportunity for personal growth and, in a larger context, plays an important role in connecting people across cultures worldwide.

As a student, you are leaving your familiar environment to embark on one of the most exciting experiences of your life. You will get to know a different culture, make new friends, become fluent in a new language, overcome a number of challenges and—we hope—have a lot of fun along the way. At the end of the program, you will have learned not only a lot about life in the United States but also about yourself. You will return home with more confidence in your abilities.

As a host family, you are graciously welcoming young people from another country into your home and inviting them to become members of your family. Besides providing a wonderful opportunity for your student, this experience will also give you a chance to learn about another culture and see your own culture and family life from a different perspective.

As American high school teachers and administrators, when you generously open your doors to an international exchange student, you also open the doors to an exchange of friendship and ideas between American youth and their international peers. You are providing an opportunity for American students to learn about the wider world, gain awareness of cultural differences, and develop a broader more accepting view of others. And you are giving exchange students a chance to appreciate American society and its democratic principles. Your contribution fosters a more enlightened generation of young citizens in an increasingly global world.

At Ayusa, we believe that high school exchange is a transformative experience for everybody involved, a chance to build meaningful connections that often last well beyond the duration of the program. We are committed to supporting all of you—our students, host families, and schools—as best we can so that your experiences with the program are successful and meaningful.

The purpose of this manual is to address common questions and challenges to help all of you fully realize the benefits of the program. Please take some time to become familiar with the content to help prepare yourself for your participation in the program. Feel free to contact your local Ayusa representative if you have any questions.

Again, the Ayusa Team welcomes you to the program, and we look forward to talking with you and hearing about your cross-cultural experiences!

Sincerely,  
The Ayusa Team

## 1.

### Cultural Adjustment

#### The Stages of Cultural Adjustment

Adjusting to a different cultural environment is an exciting but also challenging process. Every student responds differently to the challenges, but former participants and staff in the program have observed that adapting to a different cultural environment happens in various stages.

In the beginning, students usually experience excitement. Everything seems interesting, and they tend to focus on similarities between their country and the United States. After a while, the initial enthusiasm is often accompanied by—or even temporarily replaced by—what is commonly known as “Culture Shock.” The students’ focus shifts from similarities to differences between their home and host culture. This is often the stage when homesickness—missing home—kicks in.

Gradually, students overcome these challenges and begin to feel more comfortable in their new environment. After some time, they begin to function in the new culture with confidence and develop a sense of belonging.

#### Culture Shock

Almost every student experiences some level of “Culture Shock,” a term used to describe feelings such as anxiety, surprise, disorientation, homesickness, and confusion. Families might notice that students withdraw into their room, sleep excessively, lack motivation, fall behind at school, are irritable, and criticize American culture.

#### Successfully Coping With Culture Shock

Culture Shock is a completely normal response for anyone faced with the challenges of adjusting to a new environment. It is an essential part of the exchange student experience.

There are a number of strategies that are very effective in helping students with Culture Shock. Host families can be supportive by reminding their student of the following suggestions:



#### Prescription for Culture Shock

- **Get involved** in activities at school, such as sports teams and clubs.
- **Participate actively** in your host family’s life.
- **Venture out**, try new foods, make new friends, and be open to new experiences.
- **Be healthy**. Get plenty of rest and maintain a varied diet.
- **Be patient with yourself**. Adapting to a new environment takes time. It’s okay to make mistakes!
- **Laugh instead of cry** at your cross-cultural misunderstandings.
- **Reach out**. Ask for support from your host family, new friends, and Ayusa representative.
- **Learn as much as you can** about American culture to better understand cultural differences. If you are confused, ask questions. People will enjoy helping you.
- **Keep a journal** to record and express your experiences and feelings.
- **Focus on your goals** and what you hope to accomplish during your exchange experience.

## 2.

# Host Family Life

American host families come from diverse ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds. They may consist of a mother, father, and their children all living at home together, or they might be single parents or “empty nesters,” people with children who no longer live at home. Some families might include step-parents, step-children or foster children; others may have grandparents or distant relatives who are quite involved in their daily lives.

Motives for hosting are as diverse as the families who host. Some families have an interest in a specific culture, some, as descendants of immigrants, wish to connect with their own cultural heritage, and others simply wish to provide a special opportunity to a young person from another country.

Although Ayusa families decide to host for many different reasons, they have two fundamental things in common:

1. Host families are volunteers. They do not receive any payment for hosting.
2. Host families all have different and valuable perspectives to offer.

The following section of this manual is designed to help students and host families communicate effectively and foster good relationships right from the start.

### Student Arrival

When students arrive, they are likely to be excited, nervous, and very tired from their travels. Families, don't worry or be offended if your student appears emotionally and physically exhausted upon arrival. Allow time for students to rest and relax. The amount of time students need to get over their initial fatigue will vary.

The following are a few things to consider during the first few hours and days after a student arrives:

## Host Family Tips for Welcoming Your Student

- **Remind students to call their parents** as soon as they arrive (keeping in mind the international time difference!). Natural parents are likely to be worried and students might be too tired to remember to contact them.
- **Give students time to sleep and relax.** It will take them a while to recover from jetlag and all their new impressions, which might feel overwhelming.
- **Give students a tour of your home** and neighborhood to familiarize them with their new environment.
- **Speak slowly and clearly** (not overly loud) while the student is growing accustomed to communicating in English. Expressing yourself in a foreign language and trying to understand what is being said can be exhausting and frustrating.

- **Be patient.** Give students time to adapt to their unfamiliar environment. Even normally outgoing teenagers might be shy in the beginning. Avoid overwhelming the student with too many activities or expectations right away. This is not the time to throw a huge welcome party! Instead, slowly introduce the student to extended family and friends.
- **Help students feel comfortable** by asking about their needs and feelings. Do they have enough blankets and pillows in their bedroom? Are they hungry or thirsty? Would they like to rest alone in their room for a while? What would they like to do next? Students might have difficulty expressing their needs if they are having trouble with the language, are shy, or come from cultures where it is considered impolite to make requests of unfamiliar people without being encouraged.
- **Discuss modes of address.** As soon as possible, ask students whether they would like to address you as “Mom” or “Dad” or by your first or last name. You might want to give them a choice, as some students might feel uncomfortable speaking to you in a very familiar way.
- **Place reasonable limits on physical interaction.** Remember that many exchange students come from cultures in which affection is not openly or physically displayed. Respect students' wishes and nonverbal feedback regarding physical contact throughout the time they are staying with you.

## Family Rules, Schedules and Routines

Every family has their own house rules. Even within the same culture, these rules differ from family to family. Some of these rules are such an integral part of daily interactions that family members are not even aware of them. Put your family rules and habits into words and explain them to your students.

Communicating clearly about host family rules is an important way of helping students navigate through daily life, adjust to their new situation, and develop a good relationship with their host family. Plan to have a detailed conversation about family rules, schedules, and routines—ideally within the first week after arrival.

Ayusa students are expected to abide by their host family's rules and adapt to family customs and routines.

We recommend using the “Getting to Know Each Other” worksheet, a list of discussion topics Ayusa developed, to help support good communication between host families and students right from the beginning. This conversation is an opportunity both for students to learn about their host family and for host families to learn about how the student's family does things at home in their culture.

## Chores

It is common for American children and teenagers to be assigned chores (housework). Chores may include keeping one's bedroom tidy, feeding pets or livestock, setting the table, washing dishes, doing laundry, vacuuming, dusting, etc. We encourage host families to treat exchange students as their own children, which includes expecting them to help with household work. However, students should not be expected to baby-sit on a regular basis, as the focus of the Ayusa program is on academic achievement and cultural immersion, which is distinctly different from an au pair or nanny program.

## Host Family Tip for Success

To avoid misunderstandings due to cultural differences and the language barrier, be very specific when explaining chores to your student. Visual tools can be helpful in addition to explanations. We recommend demonstrating how to do the chore, then writing down instructions and the time the chore needs to be completed.

## Curfew

For safety reasons, American parents closely monitor their children's social life and activities. Children, until they are 18, might be required to ask permission if they want to go out with friends. Parents usually want to meet the friends and, in most cases, there is a set curfew (a time when children must be home at night).

Many exchange students are used to having more independence and freedom in their home country and might initially struggle with the rules in their host homes because they experience them as too strict. However, students are expected to change their lifestyle and abide by their host family's rules, including those related to social activities and curfew.



## Student Tips for Success

Remember, your host family and Ayusa are responsible for your safety, and rules are in place for your own protection. You are in a new country, and it will be more difficult for you to assess the safety of a situation and who can be trusted than in your home country. In addition, especially in the beginning, your host parents don't know you well enough to trust that you are able to make responsible decisions. You can help build trust and show your maturity by respecting their rules and acting responsibly.

When planning activities with friends, seek permission from your host parents well in advance, and always let them know where you will be. If you think you will be late for curfew, always call your host parents. While this will not excuse you from any consequences, it will reassure them that you are safe. Over time, if you act in a mature manner, you might find that your host parents are willing to give you a little more freedom—but this is entirely up to them.

## (Cell)Phone and Computer Use

Students are fully responsible for their phone bills and are expected to promptly reimburse their host family after placing calls from their family phone/s. In addition, students must pay all of their outstanding phone bills before returning to their home country. Please note that Ayusa cannot be held responsible for unpaid phone bills. To avoid problems, we strongly recommend that students use a private calling card or credit card to place calls outside the United States. Calling cards may be purchased at many convenient stores and other locations.

Many exchange students bring their own cell phone and computer and, like American teenagers, have embraced social networking and mobile technology which allows for increased communication with friends and family. Unfortunately, excessive use of cell phones and computers can negatively impact a student's exchange experience. In our experience, students who spend a great deal of time communicating with friends and family at home via phone or e-mail are likely to have more difficulty adapting to their host environment and do not fully benefit from their experience in the United States. They are less likely to form meaningful connections with their host family and American friends, and the result is a more intense feeling of homesickness and detachment from current experiences on program. In some cases this can lead to an early return. Also, a student who spends an excessive amount of time on the computer or phone is not making time to interact with his/her host family which often results in hurt feelings, and disappointment on the family's part. In addition to the potential problems described above, internet access raises important safety concerns, which are discussed in detail in the Safety section in this handbook.

Therefore it is important to establish parameters for students regarding cell phone and computer use. Students are expected to abide by restrictions imposed by their host family as long as the stu-

dent is not deprived of reasonable access and ability to reach out to Ayusa or their natural family. We suggest that students limit their contact with home to one call and/or e-mail per week. Please ask your local Ayusa representative for resources such as the Cell Phone and Computer Use Agreement and the Internet Safety Pledge.

While it's appropriate to set guidelines for students on cell phone and computer use, U.S. Department of State Regulations prohibit the removal of an exchange student's personal property, which includes the confiscation of personal computers and cell phones. As an alternative we suggest designating a location in a common area of the home where a student must store their cell phone or computer when not in use. If the excessive cell phone and computer use becomes a problem that negatively impacts the student/host family relationship, please consult with your local Ayusa representative who will mediate and, if necessary, address the issue with disciplinary steps.

## Money

Ayusa students are expected to cover their own expenses, including lunches purchased from the school cafeteria, school supplies, club and athletic fees, personal items (clothing, hygiene items, etc.), entertainment, and phone calls. Students should plan to have more money available at the beginning of the program for school related fees, as well at the end of the program for gifts, souvenirs, and outstanding bills that must be paid before they return to their home country.

Students should be prepared to rely on cash or traveler's checks for the first few months of their stay.

Upon arrival in the U.S., students must set up their own bank account. The account must be in the student's name only and set up to accept international wire transfers. In some cases, a bank might require a Social Security Number or a W-8 Form to open an account. If so, students should ask their host family for assistance in applying for a Social Security Card. It could take 4 to 6 weeks for the card to arrive in the mail. The W-8 Form can be downloaded from the Ayusa website.

Under no circumstances may students' funds be deposited into their host family's bank account or into a new account under the host family's name.

Ayusa students are responsible for managing their own finances and must always be sure to have enough funds available to meet their needs. Students should not borrow money from (or lend money to) their host family. If students have to ask their natural parents for more money, they should expect to allow approximately two weeks for the funds to arrive via international wire transfer.

As international J-1 exchange visitors, students are not allowed to work while in the Ayusa program, as this would be a violation of their visa status. However, they may work up to 10 hours per week for extra pocket money in non-competitive jobs such as babysitting, yard work, shoveling snow, and so on. It is important to discuss any work opportunities with the local Ayusa representative and host family before accepting an offer.



## Student Tips for Success

Create a monthly budget to help you manage your finances. Decide in advance how much you plan to spend on what per month (this amount for snacks, that amount on clothes, this amount for entertainment, etc.) so you don't run out of money unexpectedly.

Never give out your personal bank account or credit card information to anybody—not even your best friend!

## Religion

Many American families have a religious affiliation and attend religious services regularly. Ayusa students are encouraged to participate in their host family's lives, including religious activities. In America, religious communities have an important social function, so attending church events is a great opportunity for students to get involved in a community and make friends. In addition, experiencing different expressions of faith and the varied roles religion plays in people's lives is a good opportunity for cross-cultural learning.

However, no pressure should be placed upon students to participate in religious activities. Ayusa does not sanction any attempts to change our students' religious beliefs. In fact, students are not permitted to convert to a religion different from their own, as this would be a life-changing decision and therefore a violation of the Ayusa rules.

If students wish to attend services of their own denomination, they should feel free to do so. Ayusa appreciates the host family providing support by making any special arrangements necessary to accommodate their student's religious and spiritual needs.

## Personal Hygiene

The standards regarding what is considered "clean" are culture specific. For example, in some countries, bathing once a week is socially acceptable, but in the U.S. this would not be sufficient. Americans shower daily—usually in the morning before work or school—and change clothes frequently to remain free from body odor, which is considered to be offensive. Students who are accustomed to different standards of personal hygiene might need to change their habits to be accepted in their new school and community. Students are encouraged to bathe and shampoo their hair at least every other day, wear a different shirt or top every day, wash their clothes often, and use personal hygiene products, such as deodorant, daily.

## Successful Communication

When people of different backgrounds and personalities come together, there is great potential for meaningful connections and personal growth, but also a chance that problems and conflicts will occur. This is no different for students and host families. As in any relationship, effective communication is the basis for mutual understanding and respect. The following are 6 key elements to help avoid and address common problems that can lead to conflict.



## 6 Tips for Effective Communication

### 1. Don't be afraid to talk about your concerns and ask for support from people who might be able to help you find solutions.

Sometimes students and host families choose not to bring up issues that concern them or confide in people who cannot help resolve the problem. For example, students might discuss their concern in detail with their natural parents or their overseas partner, but their host family or local Ayusa representative is not even aware that there is an issue. Ayusa has established the following channels of communication, which have proven to be most helpful in addressing and resolving problems:

### 2. Review your expectations, determine if they are appropriate and in line with the goals of the Ayusa program, and clearly communicate them.

In some cases, students find that their host family or host community are not what they expected and respond with frustration or hostility. They might even request to be moved. Host families might also have expectations regarding their students' personality and interests or compare them to exchange students they have hosted in the past. Unrealistic expectations can lead to a negative experience.

On the other hand, there are also appropriate expectations for behavior. We recommend that students keep an open mind about their new environment and look for positive experiences outside of their expectations. We recommend that host families communicate clearly and concretely about what behavior they consider appropriate. For example, host parents should ensure that their students fully understand what is expected of them in terms of chores or adjustments to family routines and American culture.

In general, having realistic expectations and communicating them clearly is crucial to a successful program experience for both students and families. Not having too many expectations at the beginning can also be helpful.

### 3. Be open-minded and try not to make assumptions.

Everybody has assumptions and judgments. We compare people and events to our familiar beliefs and value systems, many of which are cultural. For example, in some cultures, maintaining eye contact during a conversation is perceived as rude, while in the U.S. it is viewed as feedback that we are listening and interested in what someone is saying. However, not every conflict between people from different cultures is caused by cultural misunderstandings. Either way, it is easy to jump to conclusions and pass judgment, so it is important to keep in mind that in many cases, we might be missing critical information or simply have misunderstood.

### 4. Be curious and ask questions.

In addition to the challenges of navigating through a different culture, students might be overwhelmed by having to constantly speak and understand English. It requires a great deal of effort to communicate in a foreign language, and, especially in the beginning, this can cause frustration and misunderstandings.

For students, asking questions is the best way to get additional information that might help you understand a situation and interpret someone's behavior and intentions more accurately—as they intended them. Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand something you hear or observe.

As host families, you can be supportive by encouraging students to ask questions. We recommend that host families speak slowly at first. If you are not clear that you have been understood, try asking students to repeat back in their own words what they understood from a conversation.

In addition, asking questions is a good way for host families to learn more about their students' cultural background, personality, and intentions.

### 5. Be respectful and considerate.

Despite their differences, people from all cultures respond to respect and disrespect. For example, a host family will likely be offended if their student never spends any time with them and only shows interest in going out with friends. Students might be upset if their host family does not express any interest in their culture or does not make an effort to pronounce their name correctly.

The way we show respect is different in each culture and even differs from one individual to another. However, for the most part showing respect is fairly simple, and making an effort to be considerate of other people's needs goes a long way. In concrete terms, for students, this could mean saying "thank you" often, getting involved in family life, and showing appreciation for their family's willingness to host them for the duration of the program. For host families, it could mean finding ways to help students feel comfortable and at home and giving praise for overcoming challenges.

### 6. Contact your local Ayusa representative.

Local Ayusa representatives are required to contact students and host families (separately) once per month, either in person or by phone. However, if you have any questions or feel the need for additional support, feel free to contact your local representative at any time. The sooner they have a chance to intervene and help resolve a problem, the less likely it will get worse.

## Re-matches

In our experience, most problems between hosts and students result from ineffective communication and misunderstandings based on cultural or personality differences. Therefore, our approach is to first encourage students and host families to make an effort to resolve problems by improving their communication and taking advantage of the support of their local Ayusa representative. Ayusa staff are trained to mediate conflicts between students and host families. They can help both sides better understand each other's perspective and resolve their issues together. In many cases, the result is an even stronger, closer relationship than before.

If, over time, the family and student do not settle into a mutually satisfactory relationship, the local Ayusa staff will find a new host family for the student, preferably within the same community to enable the student to stay in the same high school. Because the local Ayusa representative will take the same care in re-matching as with the first match, this process may take a few weeks. We ask host families and students for patience and cooperation during this process. In an extreme situation, Ayusa staff may remove students from the home and temporarily host them until a suitable family can be found.

## NOTES

## 3.

## Academic Life

High school attendance is not only a requirement of the J-1 exchange visitor program but also an important part of the student's cultural experience in the United States. Ayusa relies on the generosity of American high schools to accept our students into their school system, and we greatly appreciate the tremendous opportunity they give to young people from all over the world. In return, we guarantee that our students are well prepared for academic success, and we are committed to providing the highest level of support to ensure that schools can fully enjoy the benefits of hosting an Ayusa student.

The following section of this manual is designed to help students understand cultural elements of American high school life, as well as provide helpful information for schools about Ayusa students.

### Student Selection and Preparation

Before Ayusa students are accepted into the program, they must demonstrate strong academic potential through both course transcripts and school references. Students must be able to fully participate in an American high school and meet the academic requirements. Qualified English instructors assess their ability to speak, read, and write English. In addition, our students are screened for emotional maturity, focused goals, demonstrated leadership, and the ability to adapt to the challenges of life in the U.S.

Once selected for the program, Ayusa students are thoroughly prepared for their experience. Prior to arrival in the U.S., they receive an extensive pre-departure orientation facilitated by our partner organizations overseas. Upon arrival in their host communities, Ayusa staff facilitate a local arrival orientation. Orientation subject matter includes American values and lifestyles, the role of the host family, high school life, program rules and expectations, and health insurance.

### Academic Requirements

Ayusa students are expected to comply with the general school curriculum and schedule when choosing courses. Each student works closely with a school guidance counselor to determine which class level to enter and which courses to select. Wherever possible, we require students to enroll in a standard curriculum including English literature, U.S. history or government, mathematics, and science. If students have already achieved mastery levels in certain areas, or if a course is not available, they must substitute another core academic class. The remainder of the schedule may be made up of courses chosen by the student, such as additional core courses, art, music, drama, etc. Some schools require a class in physical education (sports). If students are unable to participate due to medical reasons, they may be excused.

Ayusa is an academic program; therefore, we expect our students to maintain a grade of C or better in every class they attend and in general to make a positive contribution. Poor academic performance will be addressed with disciplinary steps and, in extreme cases, could lead to dismissal from the Ayusa program. Note: In most U.S. school systems an A (excellent) is the highest grade, followed by B (good), C (average), D (poor), and F (fail/no credit).

### Tuition and School Fees

The vast majority of Ayusa students attend public schools, which are free of charge. However, some students attend private schools. In these cases, prior to enrollment, Ayusa secures written consent from the natural parents and ensures that they are academically prepared and have agreed to cover tuition fees.

Public and private schools may charge various fees related to school-sponsored activities or clubs. Additional fees may be required for school lunches, late fees for library books, a high school yearbook, or items related to graduation (if the student participates in graduation activities), such as a cap or gown.

## Studying and Homework Assignments

Students may have to spend a significant amount of time studying to ensure that they get a good start in their new school and succeed academically. This includes completing all homework and class assignments. Students should expect to get homework assignments in every class and on a daily basis. In order to receive full credit, the work must be completed and turned in on time.

### Student Tips for Success

- **Make sure you understand** what is expected of you regarding homework assignments. If you are not sure what you are supposed to do, ask your classmates or teacher for clarification.
- **Balance your time** between studying, your host family, and new friends, so you can be successful in both of the major goals of the Ayusa program: academics and cultural exchange.

## Extracurricular Activities

American high schools usually offer a variety of activities for students to choose from outside the required academic curriculum. These activities include athletic teams (American football, basketball, volleyball, swimming, etc.), civic education (debate teams, student government, school newspaper, etc.), creative expression (theater, arts, dancing, etc.), and community service (raising funds for charity, working at a soup kitchen for the homeless, building housing for low-income people, etc.).

Ayusa provides additional opportunities for our students to become actively involved in their host communities. Each November, the U.S. Department of State promotes International Education Week (IEW). Exchange students are encouraged to share information about their home countries and cultures with their schools and communities. In support of IEW, Ayusa has a contest in which students are invited to submit their cultural presentations. The creators of the top three presentations are awarded prizes.

In addition to IEW, students are strongly encouraged to become involved in community service activities, as these are a great opportunity to give back to their host communities. Ayusa sponsors an annual Community Service Contest (CSC) and awards three outstanding students for their volunteer service. For detailed information about IEW and the CSC, students should go to the Ayusa website at [www.ayusa.org](http://www.ayusa.org) or contact their local representative.

### Student Tips for Success

Participate in a range of school sports, clubs, and activities that appeal to you, as well as IEW and community service. These are excellent opportunities to make friends in your host community, and will greatly support your adjustment to your new environment. It's easier to get to know people when you share interests and participate in an activity together. Community service, especially, is focused on caring for others, so you're likely to find people in these groups who are open to befriending a new person.

## Dress Code

Most public schools in the United States do not have school uniforms, but many have dress codes regulating student attire. Dress codes usually include limitations on how short a skirt or pair of shorts can be and how much skin may be exposed. They generally include prohibitions on clothing with tears or holes, exposure of undergarments, and anything that the school and local culture considers obscene, gang-related, or unsafe. Some school dress codes specify the types of tops (e.g. collared) and bottoms (e.g. no jeans) that are allowed. Ayusa students are expected to comply with all aspects of their school's policies, including the dress code.

### Student Tips for Success

Outside of school, consider how you might be perceived based on your appearance. Compared to major cities, rural American communities might have modest and slightly conservative views regarding appropriate clothing. If you make an effort to adapt to your host community, you will find that people are more open to approaching and getting to know you. On the other hand, don't dress in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable just to fit in.

## Making Friends

When exchange students start school, they often receive a warm welcome. American peers are eager to meet them, fascinated by their foreign accent, and curious about their home country. After a while, though, the novelty can wear off, and exchange students might find that people are not as interested and friendly as they were in the beginning.

Culturally, Americans tend to be very open and friendly at first, but this behavior does not always develop into close friendships. For example, exchange students are occasionally confused when someone asks them "How are you?" and does not seem to want to listen to a genuine response, or when the comment "I'll call you later!" produces no follow up. To many Americans, "How are you?" is simply a greeting equivalent to "Hello," and the expected answer is "Fine, how are you?" Offers of further contact may be intended as a friendly gesture not to be taken literally.

Some students respond with frustration to these experiences and get discouraged. They might judge their American peers as superficial and choose to primarily associate with other exchange students who can relate to their experience. However, this response is not productive, since the best way to experience American culture is to make American friends. We recommend students view such unfamiliar behaviors as expressions of cultural differences and not let the complexities of cross-cultural social communication prevent them from forming close and meaningful friendships.

### Student Tips for Success

- **Ask your host siblings** to introduce you to their friends (if you have host siblings close to your age).
- **Be outgoing** and take the initiative. Don't just wait for people to approach you.
- **Join clubs, sports, and youth group activities** where you can connect with people through common interests.
- **Invite people to your home** to spend time ("hang out") or study together. Just make sure to get permission from your host parents first!
- **Be patient.** It takes time to build close friendships.

- **Be smart and selective** regarding whom you choose to be friends with. Don't associate with people who may tempt you to use alcohol and drugs, skip school, or participate in any other activities that are a violation of U.S. law or the Ayusa rules. Breaking the law or Ayusa rules could result in your dismissal from school, the program, and even imprisonment or deportation from the U.S.

## Dating and Sexual Activity

Dating is very common among American teens. There are casual forms of dating, such as informally going out to see a movie together or doing other fun activities either with a group or as a couple. In these situations, expectations are light and everybody pays their own way. On the other hand, there are also official dates, in which one person asks another one out with the intention of pursuing a more serious relationship. For example, an invitation to go as a couple to a school dance might be casual between close friends but more formal between two students who are less well acquainted.

If someone offers to pay for your food or entertainment, this might be a sign that they are romantically interested, but it does not obligate you to date them exclusively or become more intimate with them in any way.

Trust your instinct about expectations and act according to your own wishes. It is perfectly acceptable to turn down an invitation for a date or time with someone alone if you are uncomfortable in any way.

Before even considering going on a date, Ayusa students must have a conversation with their host parents to find out what their rules are for dating. Most American parents are more conservative than, for example, their European counterparts and do not allow their teenage children to date someone seriously or to be sexually active. Even if students had a boyfriend or girlfriend in their home country and were sexually active before, they are expected to abide by their host family's rules and change their lifestyle accordingly.



## Student Tips for Success

- **Keep it light.** A serious relationship will likely have a negative effect on your ability to have a successful experience in the program. It's easy to become preoccupied with the emotional ups and downs of a relationship. This can prevent you from being open to experiencing the full range of American life in your host community. Also, keep in mind that you will return to your home country at the end of the program. If you get too emotionally attached to someone, you are setting yourself up for a painful separation!
- **Be responsible and act maturely.** Sexual relationships come with a number of inherent risks, including intense feelings, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. The Ayusa program is an opportunity to participate in a different culture, but don't do anything or take any risks you know your natural parents or host parents wouldn't approve of. If your host parents or local Ayusa representative show concern about a relationship you are having, understand that although this might be partly a matter of different cultural values, it is primarily based on concern for your physical and psychological safety.
- **Be safe.** Dating can be dangerous and lead to experiences you do not consent to, such as sexual assault or rape. This is especially true when alcohol or drugs are involved. Someone who is drinking might be out of control. If you are drinking, you will find it harder to make safe decisions and choices. For your protection, do not put yourself in situations or engage in any activities that pose a risk to your safety and wellbeing. (Please also carefully review the section on Safety in this manual!)

## Appropriate Conduct

All participants are selected for the Ayusa program based on their maturity and proper motivation. Therefore, it is expected that all Ayusa students will conduct themselves in an appropriate and respectful manner at all times, including at school, at their host family's home, at extracurricular activities and when socializing with peers. Ayusa students must refrain from sexually harassing, sexually assaulting, bullying, threatening or committing an act of violence against any individual at any time. All allegations of any Ayusa student accused of participating in any of the aforementioned behaviors while in the United States will be taken seriously. Such cases will be evaluated for probation or dismissal.

## Diplomas and Graduation

School policies regarding graduation of exchange students varies greatly, and in some cases is regulated by the state government. Ayusa students must understand that their school administrators decide whether they will be allowed to receive a diploma or participate in the graduation ceremony. Students may request a Certificate of Attendance or a letter stating the school's accreditation policy for exchange students, but under no circumstances should students demand a diploma or any official document. Students are guests at their school, and must fully accept its rules. Ayusa will not move students to a different school so that they can graduate or obtain a diploma.

## Academic Credit for Spanish and South American Students

Spanish and South-American students have special academic requirements. In order to receive credit for their year of study in the U.S., they must take and pass certain required courses. Students and local Ayusa representatives will provide a list of required courses upon registration with the school. At the end of the school year, students must have their transcripts and diplomas (if issued by their school) notarized, verified by the County Clerk, and then legalized by the Secretary of State (for Spanish students) or their nation's nearest consulate (for South-American students). This process is called "convalidation."

Procedures for convalidation are sent to the student and local Ayusa representative approximately two months before school ends. It is entirely the student's responsibility to complete the convalidation process, not Ayusa's.

## Successfully Addressing Problems

Ayusa International appreciates the time and dedication school administrators and guidance counselors devote to supporting exchange students. Though the exchange experience is ultimately very rewarding, students often find the early weeks and months challenging as they move through stages of homesickness, culture shock, and academic and host family adjustments.

Occasionally, students' English might "freeze" when they arrive. It is harder to speak and understand American English in the U.S. than to practice it in the academic environment of their home country. This difficulty, along with the challenge of adjusting to cultural differences and academic requirements, might impact the student's ability to keep up academically. In rare cases, frustration and confusion might even lead to behavioral issues. However, the vast majority of students quickly overcome these challenges, and, once they adjust to life in the U.S., these issues resolve themselves. However, occasionally problems persist and need to be addressed with the help of Ayusa staff.

Ayusa very much appreciates that the success of every student depends upon the strength of our school partnerships and on establishing and maintaining open communication with one another throughout the school year. Local Ayusa representatives will be in frequent contact with schools, at a minimum of once every two months. However, if problems arise, we respectfully ask that counselors or other school professionals call the local Ayusa representative immediately. This helps us gain a more complete understanding of the issues at hand and enables our representative to intervene at an early stage and partner with the school to resolve difficulties. If problems cannot be resolved within a reasonable amount of time, Ayusa has disciplinary procedures in place and, in serious cases, is prepared to dismiss a student from the program (see details in the section on Disciplinary Procedures in this manual).

Ayusa students are subject to the same academic and social regulations as any other student in their school. Disciplinary action should be implemented by the school as deemed necessary. However, this does NOT include corporal punishment. (If a school is not willing to exempt Ayusa students from corporal punishment, Ayusa will not place students in that school).



## Student Tips for Success

- **Ask questions at school.** If you have a difficult time understanding what is being discussed in class, ask your classmates or teacher for clarification. Make sure you understand what is expected of you. If the teacher cannot make time to address all of your questions during class (or you don't feel comfortable asking in front of your classmates or taking up class time), ask to speak with your teacher either after the class or at the end of the school day. Take any opportunity to ask for clarification until you are able to better understand what is being communicated on your own. Don't worry, things will become clearer with time!
- **Make an appointment to meet and talk to your guidance counselor.** American schools assign a guidance counselor to each student to help them register for classes, monitor their academic progress, and provide them with support for any school or personal problem. Your counselor can also be a valuable resource for you regarding school policy, school life, and activities that might be available to you.
- **Contact your Ayusa representative.** If you continue to struggle academically and have trouble understanding and communicating in English, please inform your local Ayusa representative. Your representative will get you a private tutor—paid for by your natural parents—and help you come up with additional ideas for succeeding in school.

## NOTES

## 4. Safety

As the program sponsor, Ayusa is responsible for our students' safety and wellbeing while they reside in the United States. We take this responsibility very seriously, and we reserve the right to make decisions we consider to be in our students' best interests.

We aim to provide our students with a secure and nurturing environment that allows them to successfully complete their program. Unfortunately, we must face the harsh reality that teenagers can be exploited financially, sexually, or otherwise. In order to prevent and address these potential dangers, Ayusa relies on open communication from our students and the support of our host families and schools.

### The following section of this manual is designed to:

1. Raise general awareness about safety concerns and help students identify unsafe situations.
2. Discuss what students can do to avoid unsafe situations and protect themselves (and how host families can support them).
3. Provide information about support resources and encourage students to reach out for help at any time.

### General Safety

Given that our students are in an entirely unfamiliar environment, they need specific guidance on issues of personal safety. General safety considerations are simple, and to a large extent a matter of common sense. Students might be used to similar general safety rules at home. Host parents with children of their own are likely to be familiar with local safety concerns (such as an unsafe swimming spot, dangerous areas of town, signs of local gang activity) and can contribute additional useful advice.

Students should keep in mind that they won't be able to identify potentially dangerous situations in the U.S. as easily as they would in their home country, where they are familiar with cultural cues and are fluent in the language. Friends are a reliable source if they warn of dangers, but as teenagers themselves, they might not be accurate when it comes to assessing risks. Therefore, Ayusa students are advised to respect the opinions and advice of their host family and other responsible adults.

Ayusa asks students and host families to review, discuss, and follow the 6 basic safety tips below.



## Student Tips for General Safety

1. **Learn your host family's telephone number and address as soon as possible and familiarize yourself with your new surroundings.**  
Ask your host family to take you on a walking tour of their neighborhood. Learn the surrounding streets and main roads by name and take note of landmarks. Ask your family to help you draw or buy a map, and mark your route to school, stores, friend's houses, or other locations you might visit. Also, come up with a plan for what to do in case you get lost. For example, if you are at a public event surrounded by many people, plan a time and a place to meet in case you are separated.
2. **Don't give out your or your host family's personal information.**  
Be sure to check with your host family before giving out their telephone number, address, or other personal information to anyone, unless you know them well. Don't give out your own contact information in your home country, the name of your school, or other personal information to strangers.

### 3. Introduce your friends to your host parents.

Once you start to make friends at school or in the neighborhood, make sure your host parents meet them. Always check in with your host parents before going out with somebody new. This includes accepting rides or visiting other homes.

### 4. Always tell your host parents where you are going.

Telling someone where you will be at all times keeps you safe. Your host family will know that you are going to a safe place, and will be able to contact you in an emergency. If you do not return, they would be able to retrace your steps. Leave a phone number where you can be contacted and the address where you will be with your host family before you go out.

### 5. Don't go out alone, and never go out with someone you don't know.

Think before you accept an invitation. Remember that you'll find safety in groups; avoid going out alone. If you avoid situations that might not be safe, you are already one step ahead.

### 6. Learn the emergency numbers for the police and fire station in your region.

In some areas of the U.S.—but not all—911 is a universal emergency telephone number. If you do not know the emergency numbers you need in a crisis, dial “O” for operator and ask for help. If you are in public, you can always ask any police officer you see to assist you. They can contact your host family for you, give directions, or even transport you to a safer place.

## Extreme Sports/Activities:

Extreme Sports/Activities (such as, but not limited to: sky-diving, bungee jumping, wingsuit flying, hang gliding, base jumping, cliff diving) are deemed too dangerous and students are not allowed to participate in these activities for safety reasons. This also applies to hunting or any other activity that involves using a gun or similar weapon.

Ayusa is responsible for the safety of our students while on program and therefore we cannot allow students to participate in any activity where there is an increased risk for severe injury or death.

Participants understand that participation in sports or activities as described above will result in progressive disciplinary action (warning letter, probation or potential dismissal). Ayusa reserves the right to make decisions in the interest of the students' safety and security and such decisions are considered final.

## Internet Safety

In addition to the useful and educational information available on the Internet, a great deal of content exists that is not appropriate for teenagers. This content includes nudity or other sexually explicit material; hate or racist websites; websites that threaten U.S. national security (such as links to terrorist or suspected terrorist organizations); materials promoting the use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs; and graphic violence.

Social networking sites have morphed into a mainstream medium for teens and adults. These sites encourage and enable people to exchange personal information about themselves, share pictures and videos, write blogs, and send private messages to friends, people who share their interests, and the world-at-large. That's why it is important to be aware of the possible dangers of networking online, including sexual exploitation or solicitation.

Parents sometimes feel outpaced by their technologically savvy kids. Regardless, an open conversation about expectations and ground rules regarding computer use will help prevent problems. The following are 9 basic Internet safety rules that are essential for protecting students, as well as host families. Although this information was covered at student orientations, Ayusa encourages host families to go over these rules again with their students. Students agree to abide by these rules by signing the “Ayusa Internet Safety Pledge” provided by their local Ayusa representative.



## Student Tips for Internet Safety

### 1. Talk with your host parents about their expectations and follow their ground rules for using the computer.

Rules for being online might include the time of day, the length of time, whom you may communicate with, and appropriate websites for you to visit. Do not access other areas without your host family's permission. Follow your host family's rules for your and their safety. For example, in the U.S., it is against the law to look at certain pornographic and sexually explicit sites. If your host family's computer shows a record of going to those sites—even if you clicked on them accidentally by following a link—you and they could get arrested by the police and prosecuted.

### 2. Do not download anything from anyone you don't know.

Offensive content, spam, junk e-mail, or messages from online contacts that you do not know in person may contain viruses that can damage your host family's computer.

### 3. Keep your and your host family's identity private.

Never share personal information, such as your full name, mailing address, telephone number, the name of your school or sports team, credit card numbers, or any other information that could enable someone to identify you or locate you offline. Also, do not reveal any personal information about your host family or friends. Make sure your screen name doesn't say too much about you. Don't use your name, your age, or your hometown. Even if you think your screen name makes you anonymous, it doesn't take a genius to combine clues to figure out who you are and where you can be found. This could lead to you being stalked by a stranger or having your identity and money stolen.

### 4. Be very selective and thoughtful about where you post.

Learn about how different sites work before joining. Some sites will allow only a defined community of users to access posted content; others allow anyone and everyone to view postings. If you have to wonder if a site you want to use is appropriate, it probably isn't.

### 5. Do not “friend” anyone whom you either do not know and/or with whom you have not previously corresponded.

We recommend that you restrict access to your page to a select group of people, for example, your friends from school, your club, your team, your community groups, or your family.

### 6. Use privacy settings to restrict who can access and post on your website.

Some social networking sites have strong privacy settings. Use these settings to limit who can see your online profile. Keep in mind that even if privacy settings are turned on, some—or even all—of your profile might be viewed by a broader audience than you are comfortable with.

### 7. Do not flirt with strangers online and never agree to meet a new online friend in person as this could have serious consequences. Some people lie about who they really are and you never really know who you're dealing with.

### 8. Never respond to online communication that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Immediately tell your host parents if you receive any communication that makes you uncomfortable, confused, or scared. Never respond to messages that are rude or offensive. Show messages like these to your host parents so that they can decide if it is necessary to contact Ayusa or other authorities.

### 9. Never meet in person anyone you have met online.

The greatest danger from going online is meeting someone in person that you only know online. Due to the anonymity of the internet, people can easily lie about themselves and hide their true intentions.

## Sexual Harassment and Abuse

Although sexual abuse, or any other form of exploitation, rarely occurs during a student's exchange experience, it is important to discuss in detail, because young people are more at risk than adults. In addition, exchange students are in an unfamiliar environment. They may misinterpret cues and be unsure of how to respond if they are inappropriately approached.

Sexual abuse is defined as ANY unwanted physical touching, including being pressured to touch or kiss someone, touching of private parts of the body, being forced to look at pornographic materials, or any sexual behaviors that make someone feel uncomfortable. Abusive behavior can potentially come from anybody, even trusted adults, friends, or authority figures, such as religious leaders or teachers.

Ayusa encourages host families to open up a dialogue about safety with their students early in the exchange program to let them know that host families, along with their local Ayusa representative, are responsible for ensuring their student's safety and wellbeing in the United States.

The following are not only appropriate but the most effective ways for students to respond to inappropriate and unwanted advances from any adult (or teenager):



## Student Tips on How to Respond to Unwanted Advances and Stay Safe

### 1. Trust your feelings.

Listen to your intuition and follow your best judgment. If someone tries to touch you when you do not want them to, remember that this is not acceptable behavior. Even if you are not sure about their intentions or the cultural differences involved, listen to your feelings: if it does not feel right, take your feelings seriously and take action!

### 2. Say "No" or "Stop" in a firm, loud voice if you feel uncomfortable or threatened.

You have the right to reject unwanted and inappropriate attention from anybody. Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself. If anyone treats you or speaks to you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, tell them so, and tell that person to stop. Remove yourself from the situation as quickly as possible, or join a group of people. It is more important to protect your safety by getting out of a threatening or uncomfortable situation than to sound "polite" or worry about hurting someone's feelings. If by some chance you misunderstood a person's intentions, someone who does not wish to harm you will be supportive of your being cautious and taking care of yourself.

### 3. Reach out for help and talk to an adult you trust.

Ask for help if you are uncomfortable or concerned about a situation. You can talk to your host family, and there is always an adult at Ayusa who can help you. You can also talk with another adult whom you trust: a teacher, school counselor, or a friend's parent. Do not be afraid of getting someone in trouble. You are protecting yourself and other teenagers by telling about what you have experienced or seen. Telling someone is always the right thing to do!

### 4. Contact Ayusa.

Ayusa is always ready and prepared to help. If you feel uncomfortable or threatened at any time during your exchange experience, contact your local Ayusa representative for support. In crisis situations when you need immediate help and cannot get in contact with your local Ayusa representative (or if you do not feel comfortable talking to your representative) you can also contact your Regional Director, Regional Manager, or Ayusa Headquarters, at 1-800-727-4540. In case of an emergency, you should also contact your local police department, or call 911 (if the 911 emergency service is available in your area). If you do not know the number of your police department and need to contact them quickly, dial "0" for operator and request the number.

**Important Note: Any allegation or suspicion of sexual abuse of an Ayusa student must be immediately reported to Ayusa headquarters in San Francisco using our 24-hour toll-free emergency number: 1-800-727-4540.**

## 5.

## Social Networking

Online social networking sites have become popular for casual socializing and professional networking. Every day new online tools and new advances introduce new opportunities for people to build their virtual footprint. Social media are also an integral part of our students' lives and very beneficial to the Ayusa exchange experience. Students communicate their experiences, share photos and enhance their cultural exchange by presenting their lives through these new media.

However, social networking also creates challenges. Some of these challenges include online predators who use social media to connect with potential victims; privacy and safety of individuals being compromised when their personal data is revealed; slanderous comments that can damage people's reputation; etc. With these concerns in mind, Ayusa has established the following social networking policy that applies to all students for the duration of their program:

Students will be held responsible for everything posted and linked to their profile on social media and networking sites. This includes statements, comments and photos. Students must refrain from posting any content or images that indicate a violation of local, state or federal laws and Ayusa rules, as well as any content or images that are perceived as obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing and hateful, or hurtful to the reputation of another person. Further students must refrain from any online activity that could compromise their safety or the safety and privacy of their host family. This includes communicating or meeting with strangers, posting any information that could be used to identify their or their host family's identity or location such as full names, address, phone number, bank and credit card information, etc. Any of these actions may result in disciplinary procedures such as warning or probation and may lead to dismissal from the Ayusa program.



## Student Tips for Responsible and Beneficial Online Behavior

### 1. Obey the Law

Don't post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate applicable local, state or federal laws or regulations.

### 2. Think Before You Post

Something you post online could be the first impression that people have of you. You are representing yourself, your culture, and the Ayusa Program as a junior ambassador of your country. Remember that your readers include friends, your natural parents and host family, teachers, local Ayusa representatives as well as the college you might want to apply to next year, or the job you might want to apply for in five years. Consider that before you publish and make sure you aren't alienating any of these groups. Even your screen name could reflect on your character. Think about the impression that screen names and e-mail addresses make. Only post information that you are comfortable with others seeing and knowing about you. Remember that once you post information online, you can't take it back. Even if you delete the information from a site, older versions exist on other people's computers and can be circulated forever.

### 3. Be Careful About Posting Photos

Sharing photos through social networking sites is one way that many participants share their lives

and exchange experience with friends and family. However, photos can be altered and broadcast in ways that are beyond your control. If you do post photos, ask yourself whether you would be comfortable having them displayed in a public forum. Also keep in mind that any photos showing Ayusa participants in situations or actions that violate Ayusa rules may result in disciplinary action.

#### 4. Be Respectful

Be respectful towards others, in particular towards your host family and people in your host community. Do not post any material that can be considered defamatory, threatening, harassing or hateful. Posting inappropriate comments or images of an individual can be very hurtful and damaging to their reputation. Regardless of the intention, rumors continue to have a lasting effect on your host family because they will remain in the community long after you have returned home. Also, respect the privacy and the opinions of others. Before sharing a comment, posting a picture, or video about a friend, host family member, staff online, his/her consent is not only a courtesy, it is a requirement.

#### 5. Exercise Good Judgment

When posting to a blog or on a social networking site, refrain from discussing controversial or potentially inflammatory subjects, including politics, sex, religion or any other subjects that could offend people. Avoid personal attacks, online fights, and hostile communications. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative. Avoid sounding condescending or “loud” by using capital letters, as they are seen as rude.

#### 6. Be Safe

(Refer to the chapter on Internet Safety on page 20)

## NOTES

## 6.

### Ayusa Support

The Ayusa network in the U.S. has three levels: local staff, regional officers, and the San Francisco headquarters staff. Each of these levels has a clearly defined role in facilitating the success of the Ayusa program, and they all offer a variety of resources and support services to our students, host families, and schools.

#### Local Representatives

Each student is assigned a local Ayusa representative who serves as their main contact regarding most aspects of the program. In addition to matching students with host families, the local Ayusa representative is responsible for conducting orientations, assisting with high school enrollment, and providing support and counseling to students, host families, and schools as needed. Ayusa representatives maintain close communication with students and host families, as well as school officials. They contact students and host families separately once a month, either in-person or by phone. Schools are contacted at a minimum of every 6 to 8 weeks. Local representatives are also required to document student patterns of adjustment, outstanding accomplishments, and areas of concern.



#### Tip for Success

Students, host families, and schools are always welcome to contact their local Ayusa representative for information or advice. Ayusa staff are able to offer friendly, professional support and can help prevent minor issues from snowballing into major problems—especially if they have the opportunity to get involved at an early stage.

#### Regional Offices

Ayusa maintains several regional offices throughout the U.S., each headed by a full-time Regional Manager (RM). The RMs lead a team of local representatives, including Regional Directors (RD)—who oversee a particular area within their region—and Community Representatives (CR)—who are directly supervised by RDs. Both RDs and CRs function as local Ayusa representatives and the main Ayusa contact for students, host families, and schools.

RMs do not usually get directly involved in student and host family support issues unless situations have escalated to a level where they cannot be resolved by local staff intervention. RMs are in direct communication with Ayusa’s overseas partners and may request information or support from students’ natural parents through the overseas office. The RM should only be contacted in case of an emergency or if neither the CR nor RD is available for a 24-hour period.

#### Headquarters

Ayusa headquarters are located in San Francisco, California, and the headquarters staff are generally responsible for field (student, host family, RM, RD and CR) support and program operations, including training and direction of the regional offices, managing escalated student issues, and closely managing emergencies.

In the event of a crisis involving a student’s wellbeing or safety, we ask students, host families, and schools to call the 24-hour toll-free emergency number of the San Francisco office: 1-800-727-4540. (For more detailed information on handling emergencies, please refer to the section on Ayusa’s Emergency Procedures on page 33 in this manual.)

## Program Rules And Policies

The purpose of rules and policies is to support participants' efforts to successfully navigate through the program. The following section of this manual outlines the rules and policies that are most relevant to our student participants.

### Ayusa Rules

As part of the Ayusa program application process, students and their natural parents sign an agreement to abide by the Ayusa program rules. These rules are designed to protect our students, host families, and schools, and provide the general framework for a successful program experience.

Ayusa expects our students to abide by the program rules. In cases where a rule is broken (depending on the severity of the infraction), local Ayusa representatives will provide guidance as the student works to change the behavior in question. However, even the strongest support system is only effective if students display the maturity and willingness to correct their mistakes. If problems cannot be resolved within a reasonable amount of time, Ayusa will take disciplinary action, following an established procedure. (Please refer to the section on Disciplinary Procedures in this manual).

### The Ayusa Rules are summarized as follows:

#### **Rule 1: Host Family Regulations**

Students must obey host family regulations including, but not limited to, rules regarding curfew, household chores, dating, contact with home, and computer and phone privileges (including personal laptops and cell phones). Students are responsible for covering the cost of all long-distance and international telephone calls as they incur them. Students may not have guests in the host family's home without their host family's consent and supervision.

#### **Rule 2: Academic Life**

Ayusa is an academic program. Students are responsible for attending school and achieving a C or better grade in every class. They must follow all academic and behavioral requirements as defined by their high school or Ayusa. If the school administration determines that a student is no longer welcome to attend due to behavioral or academic problems, the student may be dismissed from the Ayusa program.

Ayusa does not in any way guarantee that students may enroll in twelfth grade classes, graduate, or receive a diploma from a U.S. high school. Students must accept and obey their school's policies.

#### **Rule 3: Local, State and National Laws**

Students are subject to the authority and laws of their host country and must obey all national, state, and local laws and regulations. Students must use their best judgment and learn these laws. Ignorance of the law is not considered a legal defense for breaking it. Exchange students are not exempt from legal prosecution. Participants agree to hold Ayusa blameless for any or all consequences that may result from a student breaking the law of the land. Breaking the law is grounds for dismissal from the Ayusa program.

#### **Rule 4: Drugs**

The use or possession of non-prescription drugs or controlled substances is illegal. Students may only take medications prescribed by their doctor or medicines commercially available in the host country. Some medications that are commercially available in other countries require a doctor's prescription in the United States. Use of illegal drugs is grounds for dismissal from the Ayusa program. Exchange students arrested for drug use or possession face the same penalties as citizens of the United States, including mandatory fines or prison terms, and will be immediately dismissed from the Ayusa program.

#### **Rule 5: Drinking and Smoking**

Students may not drink or purchase alcoholic beverages, including beer and wine. The minimum drinking age in the United States is 21 years. Arrest and expensive fines may result from violating this law, and it is grounds for immediate dismissal from the Ayusa program. Students are not allowed to smoke nicotine (cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, etc.) during the program, and will face Ayusa disciplinary procedures if they violate this rule.

#### **Rule 6: Driving**

Students may only participate in a driver's education program offered by their high school. They are not guaranteed an opportunity to obtain a driver's license. Students may not drive motor vehicles, except during participation in a formal driver's education program at their high school, because students' insurance does not cover these activities. This ban applies to four-wheelers, jet-skis, tractors, and any other motorized vehicle. Students may only participate in school sponsored driver's education with the permission of the local school, natural parents, host parents, and Ayusa. Students are not allowed to be passengers on motorcycles, motorbikes, or scooters. They are not allowed to purchase or own any motor vehicle.

#### **Rule 7: Life-Changing Events**

Ayusa students may not initiate any "life-changing" decisions, events, or actions while in the program. This includes changing religion (though a student may explore the tenets of any religion), pregnancy, and marriage. Students are expected to refrain from sexual activity while in the Ayusa program. Students may not alter their body (tattoos, body piercings, etc.) in any way while in the program, even if they have permission from their natural parents.

Regarding religion: Host families should understand that students are not required to attend any religious services. However, in the spirit of learning about their host family's values and lifestyle, Ayusa encourages students to attend religious services or activities if they are an integral part of the family's life. If students are uncomfortable with the religious content of services or activities, they are not required to participate.

Students may be dismissed from the program if they suffer from a life-threatening medical condition, such as cancer, depression, or an eating disorder.

#### **Rule 8: Travel**

For safety and security reasons, Ayusa needs to know the whereabouts of students at all times. Students are expected to comply with the following rules and conditions regarding any travel.

- All student overnight travel away from the host community and without the host family must be approved by Ayusa and the student's natural parents. Students are responsible for completing an Ayusa Request for Student Travel Form and communicating details to their local Ayusa representative at least 14 days before proposed travel date.
- Students must obtain travel permission from Ayusa for trips with their host family that include more than three overnight stays. Natural parent approval is required in addition for host family trips that involve leaving US territory.
- For all trips that involve less than three overnight stays, students are responsible for informing their Community Representative in advance and must provide contact information where they can be reached while traveling.
- Flights and accommodations should not be purchased prior to obtaining approval for travel. Students and natural families are financially responsible for any trips that must be cancelled or rescheduled due to lack of travel permission.
- All student travel must occur after January 15th and should be limited to weekends and school vacation periods. Exceptions may be made for trips with the host family, and for school or Ayusa sponsored trips including Belo Tours. In order for students to be permitted to miss school in the context of travel, his/her school and Ayusa must grant approval.
- Students may not travel independently; to travel, a student must be accompanied by a responsible adult (25 years or older) that is approved by Ayusa. Exceptions may apply for flights to and from Ayusa sponsored events.

- Students may not visit their home country during the program.
- Educational travel or sightseeing tours that are not with the host family or sponsored by the school or Ayusa, must be booked through Belo Tours, which is a pre-authorized Ayusa partner tour company.
- In order to travel, a student must be in “good standing” with Ayusa. Students are not considered in “good standing” if they are on warning or probation, or if their behavior indicates that they cannot be trusted to conduct themselves in a responsible, safe, and mature manner while traveling. For students who were placed on warning at an earlier time in the program, travel permission may be granted at the discretion of the Regional Manager if significant improvement has been made on the part of the student.

**Please note: The Ayusa Travel Policy goes into effect the moment when students enter the United States.**

**Rule 9: Visits To and From Friends and Family**

Visits from natural parents and friends from the student’s home country (and to/from relatives and friends in the U.S.) can be extremely detrimental to the student’s adjustment process and language learning. Therefore, visits from natural parents, extended family, or friends are not authorized by Ayusa until the end of the program. Additionally, any travel that a student undertakes with his or her natural parents must take place after the student completes the program in accordance with Ayusa Travel and Program Release Policies (rule 8 and 10).

Violation of this rule is grounds for dismissal from the Ayusa program.

**Rule 10: Returning Home / Program Release**

The Ayusa program follows the U.S. academic calendar. Students are expected to return to their home countries within two weeks after the last day of school. If a student remains in the country after this date, he or she must complete and submit an Ayusa Program Release form, which must be signed by the natural parents and approved by the Ayusa Regional Manager. After the program release date, Ayusa and the host family will not be responsible for students as part of the Ayusa program, and all benefits and services associated with the program will no longer be available.

Program release is a privilege that can be revoked at any time. Students who withdraw or have been dismissed from program are not eligible for program release and must return home immediately. A program release will only be granted based on the following conditions:

- The student will be in the care and supervision of an adult over the age of 25 for the duration of the stay.
- The student must be in “good standing” with Ayusa with no disciplinary record or concerns.
- The student will uphold all visa rules and regulations set forth by the U.S. Department of State during the program release period, including the requirement that you have health and accident insurance coverage for the duration of their stay in the U.S.
- The circumstances surrounding the request must be in the student’s best interest and consistent with Ayusa’s mission.

Any violation of Ayusa program release policy and expectations may impact a student’s SEVIS immigration record and future re-entry to the U.S.

Participants understand that while Ayusa reviews each student’s situation on a case-by-case basis, any infraction of any of the above rules and/or acceptable behavior may be grounds for dismissal from the Ayusa program. Ayusa reserves the sole and final right for decisions on student dismissals and may return a student to his or her home country immediately at any time at his or her own expense.



## Student Tip for Success

Following the Ayusa Rules will not only prepare you for a positive experience in the program but will also have a more far-reaching effect. Remember, during your time in the U.S. you are not only representing yourself, you are also representing your country. For many Americans you meet during your stay in the U.S., you might be the only person from your country that they will ever encounter. The impression you make directly reflects on your culture. You are truly an ambassador for your home country, and with this role come much responsibility. Ayusa has selected you for this program because we believe that you can handle this responsibility and we expect you to take it very seriously.

## Disciplinary Procedures

Ayusa has a set of formal disciplinary procedures in place to address the breaking of Ayusa rules, behavioral problems, or inadequate academic performance. Disciplinary steps reinforce program boundaries and expectations, provide guidance, and hold students accountable for their behavior. Ayusa has a 3-step system in place that provides several chances for a student to make amends for mistakes and move forward in a positive manner.

**Step 1: Warning**

When behavioral or academic problems occur, Ayusa’s first step is to issue a warning letter. This letter includes a description of the unacceptable behavior, expectations for the future, a timeline for behavioral changes, and clear consequences, such as terms of probation if the requested behavioral expectations are not met. The Regional Director or Regional Manager sends this letter to students, who will be asked to sign it to confirm that they have read and understood the contents and agree to the terms. This signed copy must be mailed to the Regional Manager and will be placed in the student’s file. The warning letter, along with additional documentation, will be shared with the appropriate overseas partner, who in turn will inform the student’s natural parents.

**Step 2: Probation**

If students do not fulfill the terms outlined in the warning letter and continue to display inappropriate behavior or fail to improve their academic performance, they will be placed on probation. A probation letter is then issued by the Regional Manager and sent to the student. The content of this letter is similar to the warning letter and must be signed and processed in the same way. The natural parents will again be notified. However, in the case of probation, Ayusa staff will meet with students in person to review the letter and ensure that they fully understand the seriousness of the situation and what behavioral changes are required. Probation is a much more serious step than a warning letter, and is considered to be a final trial period to determine whether students make the behavioral changes necessary to remain in the program. If they fail to do so, the likely consequence is dismissal from the program.

**Step 3: Dismissal**

Dismissal occurs when Ayusa decides that a student’s behavior is not acceptable for the program. The decision to dismiss a student resides with the Ayusa management team at headquarters. Ayusa regards dismissal as a last resort, and this step is preceded by a thorough investigation. Prior to dismissal, extensive efforts will have been made to support students and give them a fair opportunity to remain in the program. Once a student is in the process of being dismissed from the program, Ayusa will formally notify the U.S. Department of State that the student’s program has ended early. Students are then required to immediately return to their home country. Remaining in the U.S. would be illegal at this point, and might affect their ability to get a visa to return to the U.S. in the future.

In some cases, a student may be immediately put on probation or dismissed from the program without the procedures outlined above. These cases are rare and involve a serious violation of an Ayusa rule or U.S. law.

In order to best support students and ensure that disciplinary action is conducted in a fair and unbiased manner, each step in the disciplinary process includes the following three elements:

1. If possible, prior to disciplinary steps going into effect, the local Ayusa representative makes an effort to provide counseling to the student and to mediate between the student and other parties involved (if applicable). Students are verbally informed of the consequences of their behavior and have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.
2. Students are asked to write a statement expressing their perspective.
3. Local Ayusa staff conduct a thorough investigation to gather as much information as possible, to ensuring that the perspectives of all parties involved are taken into consideration. In certain cases, Ayusa may solicit additional documentation from professional sources, such as physician's statements, psychological evaluations, etc. to accurately assess the situation.

### Emergency Procedures

In general, an emergency is defined as any situation that is life threatening or poses a major danger to a program participant's physical or emotional health. The following six situations qualify as emergencies:

- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Death of a student                          | 5. Allegations of sexual abuse        |
| 2. Death of an immediate host family member    | 6. Runaway/missing student            |
| 3. Death of an immediate natural family member | 7. National disaster/political crisis |
| 4. Health crisis/major illness                 | 8. Arrest/imprisonment                |

Emergencies are closely managed by Ayusa headquarters and require notification of the U.S. Department of State. Swift communication with Ayusa is key so that staff are in a position to respond quickly and prevent further damage or escalation. In case of an emergency, it is critical that the Ayusa headquarters office be notified immediately. We ask that anybody aware of a possible emergency concerning an Ayusa student contact the San Francisco office directly at 1-800-727-4540 as soon as possible—even if all the details are not yet available.

————— NOTES —————

## 8. Insurance

Students are provided with medical insurance as part of the Ayusa program ([www.ayusa.org/insurance](http://www.ayusa.org/insurance)). Depending on their nationality, Ayusa students are covered by one of several medical insurance plans. Coverage is limited to emergencies and health problems of an unforeseen nature. Students' insurance policies do not cover pre-existing conditions, nor can they be considered a comprehensive medical plan.

However, regardless of insurance concerns, students should always go to a doctor or hospital if they are in need of medical care.

All students receive insurance policy information, an identification (I.D.) card, required forms, and detailed instructions on how to handle insurance claims. This information should be kept in a safe and accessible place known to both the student and the host family. Students should carry their insurance I.D. card with them at all times, as it may be required as proof of coverage if they need medical attention in an emergency. A copy of the I.D. card should be kept at home in case the original gets lost.

Ayusa requests that host families review their students' insurance information as soon as possible, prepare in advance for situations that might require medical services for their student, and provide support with claims processing. Despite a thorough orientation, most students are not experienced in dealing with insurance claims and will rely on adult guidance. The following are basic suggestions on how to successfully handle insurance issues and respond to possible problems:

————— NOTES —————



## Tips on How to Handle Medical Insurance Issues

- Students' health comes first. Take a sick or injured student to a doctor or hospital immediately if they are in need of urgent care. Do not delay due to insurance concerns!
- Look over your student's insurance information in advance. If your student needs medical attention, or in case of an emergency, it will be helpful to already be familiar with this information.
- Students may be required to pay a small fee out of pocket at the time of a routine doctor's visit. Make sure they have money or a credit card with them to cover such fees.
- Call the 24-hour phone number of the insurance company to get approval for non-urgent doctor's visits and to obtain instructions for claims processing. Make sure the doctor or clinic is covered by the insurance. In case of emergency, contact the insurance company after you have obtained medical care for the student.
- Insurance information and forms may be available on a website, and may require login information. Go over this information with your student.
- Take the student to the hospital or doctor's office and follow the insurance company's instructions. Make sure to show the receptionist the student's insurance I.D. for their records and so that the medical provider can submit claim forms.
- Make sure that a claim form gets filled out by the medical provider or student. Providers usually submit forms directly to insurance companies, but students may need to pay for services and submit forms themselves. If so, make sure that the original medical bills and correct insurance company forms get mailed to the insurance company. When sending paperwork to the insurance company, always be sure to make and keep copies. .
- Follow-up. If bills have not been paid by the insurance company and you continue to get invoiced by the medical provider, contact the claims processing department of the insurance company and inquire about the status of the claim. When you call the insurance company, be prepared to give them the claim number (if available), the name of the student (you might need to spell it for them to ensure that the correct record is accessed), the date of service, the name of the physician or hospital, and the amount on the bill. If the insurance company gives you an update on the status of the claim, forward this information to the doctor's office.
- Possible Insurance Problems and How to Respond
- The insurance company delays payment. Find out why payment is delayed. If the company needs further documentation or information in order to continue to process the claim, follow up with the doctor's office to obtain the requested paperwork.
- The insurance company denies payment. Contact the insurance company and find out why coverage is denied. Do you need to send additional information for them to reconsider their decision? You may need to send your request for an appeal in writing. If the decision is final, ask the company to send you a letter explaining the reasons they refuse to pay. Contact your Ayusa representative for support. Make sure to give your representative copies of all of the students' insurance information and documentation regarding the claim so that they can follow up and help resolve the issue.
- You receive letters from a collection agency. Contact the student's insurance company to find out what the status of the claim is and why the bills have not been paid yet. Contact your Ayusa representative.
- If you have any questions or an insurance issue does not get resolved, please don't hesitate to ask your local Ayusa representative for support!

## 9.

### Returning Home

Preparing for the end of the program is as important as preparing for the beginning of the program.

As students, getting ready to return home means taking practical steps as well as saying goodbye to the people and places you connected with over the course of the program. As host families, it means saying goodbye and adjusting to one less household member.

A few weeks prior to departure, local Ayusa representatives conduct a re-entry orientation to prepare students and host families for the end of the program. This orientation includes a detailed discussion addressing the challenges of going home and saying goodbye. The following are a few basic tips for students:



### Student Tips for Returning Home

Make your return flight arrangements early. The first step is to decide when you want to return home. Make sure to discuss your plans with your host family to accommodate their needs as well. Generally, you should return home within two weeks after your school's spring semester ends. If you have an open return ticket, contact the airline to book your return flight. Ayusa suggests doing this as early as January or February because flights fill up quickly during the summer holidays and seat availability is limited. If the agency in your home country is booking your return flight, contact them early in the year to find out what the process is and if anything is required from you.

Pay all your bills. Prior to departure for your home country, make arrangements to pay off all of your debts, including telephone bills, school fees, activity fees, etc. Also, remember to close your bank account.

Memories, souvenirs, gifts, and luggage. Don't wait until the last minute to take photos of friends, places, and anything else you'll want to have pictures of. Sketch some memories. Write in your journal. Gather souvenirs and gifts to bring home and share with your family and friends. Call your airline or check online to find out how many bags you may bring with you on your flight, and what the weight limits are for each bag. You may need to pay additional fees for oversized or overweight luggage. Use a bathroom scale to check if your luggage is overweight. If you have a lot of luggage, you might want to ship some of it home ahead of time.

Plan your good-byes. Give yourself time to say "Thank You" to your host family. Tell them what your life will be like in your home country when you return and about your favorite memories of life with them in America. Also, thank other people who made your stay special: your local Ayusa representative, friends, teachers, etc. It is very important to say good-bye. This will help you leave behind what must be left and get ready for all that is ahead of you.

10.

# Important Contact Information

## Ayusa Headquarters

**Telephone**

General Inquiries: 1-888-552-9872  
Emergency: 1-800-727-4540 (toll free)

**Fax**

1-415-434-5470

**Mail**

Ayusa International  
600 California Street, Floor 10  
San Francisco, CA 94108

**Student Support E-mailbox**

studentsupport@ayusa.org

**Website**

www.ayusa.org

**Local Ayusa Representative**

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Regional Director (if applicable)**

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Regional Manager**

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

## U.S. Department of State

**Mail**

United States Department of State Office  
of Exchange Coordination and Designation  
ECA/EC/PS - SA-44, Room 734  
301 4th Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20547

**Telephone**

1-866-283-9090

**Fax**

1-202-203-5087

**E-mail**

jvisas@state.gov

**Website**

www.state.gov

11.

# Personal Numbers and Addresses

Host family phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Host family address: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency contact for host family: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's natural parents phone (including country codes): \_\_\_\_\_

Student's home address: \_\_\_\_\_

Police: \_\_\_\_\_

Fire: \_\_\_\_\_

Ambulance: \_\_\_\_\_

Health insurance company phone: \_\_\_\_\_

School name and phone: \_\_\_\_\_

School Guidance Counselor name and address: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional names and phone numbers: \_\_\_\_\_







## A Part of Intrax Cultural Exchange

Ayusa International is a non-profit organization founded in 1981 to promote global learning and leadership through foreign exchange, study abroad and leadership programs for high school students from the U.S. and around the world. In addition, Ayusa administers multiple high profile grant programs funded by the U.S. Department of State.

[www.ayusa.org](http://www.ayusa.org) | 800.579.1709

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