



Differences in Religion and Spirituality

Spirituality is a deeply personal matter and religion might or might not be an important part of a host family's life. If a student does not want to be involved in the host family's religious activities, it is important to have a conversation with the student to learn about his/her concerns. The following are examples for possible concerns and suggestions on how to respond. If your student:

- ❖ Is coming from a secular society and is not used to active religious practices, be patient and allow the student to develop curiosity about different ways of living.
- ❖ Seems to have pre-conceived ideas about your religious affiliation that are based on inaccurate information, talk about these ideas and give the student an opportunity to learn.
- ❖ Is concerned about being pressured into changing beliefs, reassure him/her that you have no intention to do so and remind him/her that life-changing decisions are against ETC rules.
- ❖ Is concerned about not being able to continue with his/her own religious practices (if different from yours), try to find ways for him/her to connect with his/her own religious affiliation.
- ❖ Is worried that he/she is expected to be involved in all of your church activities, have an open conversation to clarify expectations and come to an agreement that works for everybody.

Per US State Department regulations, "proselytization is prohibited and an exchange student cannot be required to attend religious services, but may decide to experience this facet of U.S. culture at their own discretion". You may ask your student to attend religious services or programs with you as a family, and ideally he/she will agree to have an open mind and see it as an opportunity to learn about life styles that are different from their own. An open dialogue about the differences in religion/spirituality is a great opportunity for cross-cultural learning. If you and your student cannot find a solution you both feel comfortable with, contact your local coordinator for support.

