



Adjustment Issues and Conflict

Conflict between student and host family is not uncommon. Causes of conflict include: failure to follow host family rules, weak adjustment effort and uncooperative attitude. Students sometimes feel disappointed because the host family is different from what they expected. Staff and host families should be aware of three primary issues that often contribute to conflict – culture, character and teenage development.

Culture

Culture is the process by which we make sense of the world in which we live. It involves food, language and how ideas are expressed. It shapes our ideas, our personalities, the ways in which we behave and the shared way in which we look at the world. Cultural differences can cause misunderstanding. The following recommendations can be helpful for resolving a conflict based on cultural differences:

- Talk about what is acceptable or inappropriate and understand that there are different definitions of values and appropriate behavior in different cultures.
- Remember that the experience of hosting also includes an adjustment on the host family's part.

Character

Character is a combination of qualities that create personal identity and differences. It involves peoples' traits, morals, standards of behavior, virtues and ethics. Character traits include responsibility, maturity, sense of humor, honesty, respect, temperament, etc. If you are struggling with issues that are related to the character of your student, the following things are helpful to keep in mind:

- You are not responsible for molding your student's personality, nor are you responsible for the student becoming a responsible adult.
- You are caregivers and teachers to your student but one step removed from the direct responsibility of a natural parent (more like a grandparent).

Teenage Development

The transition from childhood to adulthood is a very complex time because of the multiple layers of thoughts and emotions. Working through this common phase takes time and energy and can result in the following:

- Not wanting to communicate with adults
- Needing to feel independent
- Feeling insecure and lack of self-esteem
- Being manipulative and/or openly defiant
- Rebelling against rules
- Appear indifferent

This is how you can help your student deal with his/her feelings:

- Reinforce self-worth, self-esteem and stress management in healthy ways.
- Be available, listen, and wait before giving advice.
- Show respect and give some validity to what the student is saying (even if the student's behavior seems manipulative).
- Invite one on one discussions so that feelings and thoughts can be shared.

In dealing with teenagers it is important to keep rules in place. Although teens might try to get around the rules they usually do not want to overthrow them.

Here some helpful suggestions on how you might resolve conflict over rules:

- Explicitly state what the rules are and clearly communicate consequences in case they are not followed.
- Explain that rules are the same for all youth living in the house.
- Ignore responses and threats like "I don't care" or "No, I won't" – don't argue, just continue with your demands.
- When cooperation fails:
 - o Make a clear statement that the rule has been broken
 - o Emphasize that such behavior is not acceptable
 - o Declare that the rule remains in effect

And Remember...

In most cases conflict between student and host family can be worked out and a solution that is of mutual benefit can be found. There are some basic things to keep in mind when dealing with conflict. To see what they are please take a look at the "Tips for Dealing with Conflict" handout.

If the issues persist despite your efforts, please contact your local coordinator for support. They can act as a mediator and help to facilitate good communication and help find a solution that is of mutual benefit for host family and student.