A photograph of four young adults (two women and two men) standing on a rooftop with a city skyline in the background. They are all wearing dark jackets covered in numerous pins and patches, including the Rotary logo. The image is partially covered by a semi-transparent purple rectangle on the left side, which contains the title text.

ROTARY YOUTH EXCHANGE A Guide for Students

3330
4195
CREATE HOPE
FOR THE WORLD
Rotary 

CONTENTS

1

**WELCOME TO
YOUTH EXCHANGE**

2

**PREPARING FOR
YOUR DEPARTURE**

3

**RULES AND
EXPECTATIONS**

4

DURING THE EXCHANGE

5

YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

6

**NAVIGATING
CHALLENGES**

7

**YOUTH PROTECTION
AND SAFETY**

8

AFTER THE EXCHANGE

9

**PARENT AND
GUARDIAN RESOURCES**

1

WELCOME TO YOUTH EXCHANGE

AN INTRODUCTION TO ROTARY

5

PROGRAM GOALS

6

Being an exchange student in another country is a special opportunity that can influence the rest of your life. Your exchange will allow you to experience a new culture and new ideas and will help you grow and learn in new ways.

The Rotary Youth Exchange program offers secondary school students the chance to travel abroad, live with host families, and experience life in a different country, school, and social environment. Exchange students develop intercultural competencies, communication abilities, and leadership skills. They commit to upholding Rotary's values and join the wider Rotary community of catalysts for peace.

Rotary Youth Exchange isn't just a student program — it engages an entire community. Everyone, including the students, has a role in shaping the short-term and long-term program experience. This includes:

- ▶ **Program leaders** — Rotary Youth Exchange is powered by volunteers who dedicate their time, expertise, and commitment to youth service to creating safe and enriching programs. Your host club will appoint an adult volunteer as your Rotary counselor. This person's role is to support you, answer questions, address concerns, or help solve any problems during your exchange.
- ▶ **Host families** — Rotary members and nonmembers volunteer to be hosts because of their generosity, spirit of community service, and interest in living with someone from another culture. Host families open their home voluntarily and people whose children take part in the program aren't required to be hosts. This ensures that host families are committed to Rotary's mission of service and peacebuilding.
- ▶ **Parents and guardians** — Your family entrusts your safety to our volunteers so you can experience the excitement and life-changing growth of an exchange. Because our program is managed by volunteers, the experience is more affordable and accessible than similar non-Rotary programs.
- ▶ **Alumni** — The members of Youth Exchange alumni groups that are sometimes called Rotex speak at student orientations about their experiences, serve as peer mentors or Rotary counselors, and connect with each other in a global network of people who have been part of this program.
- ▶ **Students** — Students like you are the most important part of our community! The students — prepared for challenges and self-development and committed to the ideals of service, peacebuilding, and belonging — are why Rotary Youth Exchange is one of our most beloved programs.



This guide will help prepare you for your Youth Exchange experience, offer prompts to help you think about your goals and record your thoughts during your exchange, and help you transition back home afterward.



Throughout this guide, you'll find questions and spaces with the pencil image to take notes that can help you organize your thoughts and focus on what you want from your exchange.



Focus on: **What motivates me to go on exchange?**

AN INTRODUCTION TO ROTARY

This guide provides a general introduction to the Rotary Youth Exchange program and some of your responsibilities as a participant. It also offers some ideas to consider before, during, and after your exchange.

Detailed information and answers to more of your questions should be addressed at orientation sessions, arranged by your local Youth Exchange programs, both before your exchange and after you arrive in your host country. These sessions are critical to your experience in the program.

Another vital part of your exchange is understanding the organization sponsoring you. What is Rotary?

Rotary and Rotaract clubs are member organizations that include business and community leaders who strive to improve their communities through service, promote high ethical standards, and foster understanding and goodwill throughout the world.

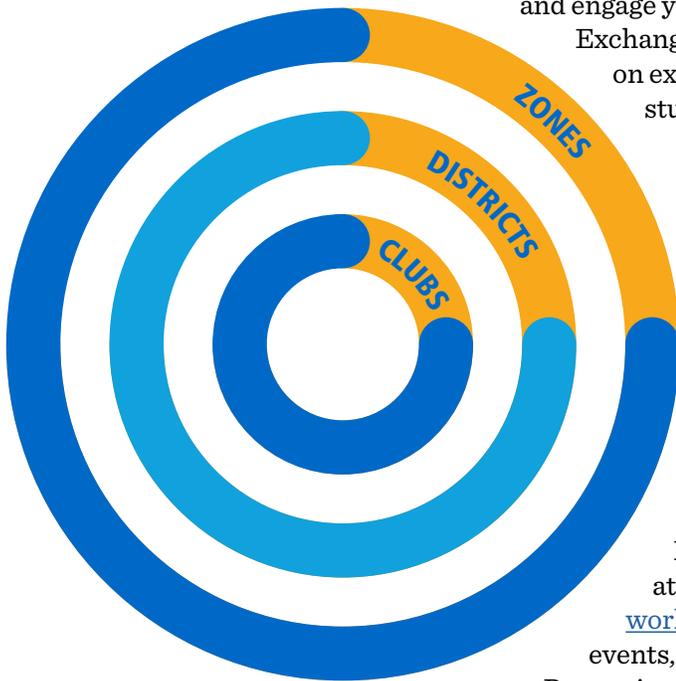
Clubs carry out a variety of activities, including those that support, empower, and engage young leaders. When clubs are involved in Youth Exchange, they support students by either sponsoring them to go on exchange or by serving as the local host club for incoming students.

Rotary districts are composed of clubs in defined geographic areas. In more than 500 districts worldwide, leaders support clubs and facilitate programs such as Youth Exchange, Interact, and Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA). Districts manage the Youth Exchange application process, train volunteers, and place and support students.

Rotary zones are groupings of districts across larger geographic areas.

Rotary International (RI) is the association of Rotary and Rotaract clubs worldwide. Staff members at [Rotary's world headquarters in the U.S. and offices worldwide](#) support club members with their activities, events, and programs. The RI Youth Exchange and Youth

Protection team supports districts and develops standard program materials and resources. The team also ensures that districts follow the policies aimed at keeping exchanges safe, inclusive, and aligned with Rotary's ideals.



**Do you have more questions about Rotary and its structure?
Ask your club counselor or district leaders, or send questions to
youthexchange@rotary.org.**

PROGRAM GOALS

Your reasons for embarking on this journey are unique to you. Perhaps you want to learn a new language or practice one that you know. Maybe you want the challenge of becoming more independent, resilient, or culturally aware. Whatever your reasons, the Youth Exchange program is designed to help you build:



Language skills — Learn and practice a new language in school, with your host families, and in the community through immersion and practical applications that are valuable far beyond the classroom.



Friendships — Develop lasting relationships with other young people and with families in your host community and from around the world.



Cognitive skills — Develop an understanding and awareness of various cultures and their effect on society, and recognize the role of cultural context.



Interpersonal skills — Become more aware of your relationships with others and how you communicate and collaborate with them, and engage in culturally sensitive ways with people from different backgrounds.



Intrapersonal skills — Become more aware of your own emotions, thoughts, behavior, and identity and how to manage them appropriately; have a sense of purpose; and respect cultural differences.



An understanding of inclusive practices and belonging — Celebrate the contributions of people of all backgrounds, consider how to provide appropriate support and resources to individuals with a range of needs and experiences, and help create environments in which all people are welcomed, respected, and valued.



Knowledge about peacebuilding — Recognize the root causes of conflict—such as poverty, discrimination, ethnic tension, lack of education, and unequal resource distribution—is essential for effective peacebuilding. By understanding these issues, you can play a key role in promoting knowledge and creating a more peaceful society.



Focus on: **What are *my* goals for my exchange?**

2

PREPARING FOR YOUR DEPARTURE

RESEARCH YOUR DESTINATION

8

BUILD YOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS

9

UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN CULTURE

9

OBTAIN TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

10

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

12

PACK THE ESSENTIALS

13



RESEARCH YOUR DESTINATION

Knowing more about where you're going will build your confidence, so it's a good idea to study your host country. You can start your research by using reputable websites, visiting a library, or contacting a consulate.

Try to learn about the history, geography, literature, and arts of your host country. You don't need to become an expert, but having a base of knowledge will be helpful.

Former Youth Exchange students are often eager to share their experiences with later participants, so ask your district leaders to connect you with past participants or an alumni association.

Research as much as you can before your exchange. Ask your sponsor club and district leaders for any additional resources, both online and in your community, that may better prepare you for your exchange experience.



Focus on: About my host country

BUILD YOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS

Knowing the host country's language will make your transition easier and is important to the success of your exchange. In addition to regular classes, many smartphone apps and social media accounts can facilitate your learning.

Some clubs and districts require students to complete language courses or demonstrate basic language skills before their exchange if the host country's primary language is different from their own. Demonstrating your language proficiency is also sometimes needed for you to be granted a visa.

UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN CULTURE

Thinking about your own country's customs and values will enable you to better understand why those might be different in your host country. This assessment will also mean that you'll be more comfortable speaking about your country and sharing your culture with people in your host country. Understanding your country's history, culture, and geography will allow you to answer questions thoroughly and objectively.



Focus on: **About my own culture**

My country's languages:

History fun fact:

Geography fun fact:

Culture fun fact:

My favorite thing about my home country:

OBTAIN TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

You'll need to obtain travel documents such as a passport, visas, and vaccination or inoculation certificates. The government of your home country or the host country may also require other documents. Although the Rotary Youth Exchange officers in your sponsor district can help with some details, it is primarily your responsibility to ensure that everything is in order. Here's some of what you need to do:



Apply for a passport as soon as the local club informs you that you'll be considered for the program.



Apply for a visa as soon as possible after you've been fully accepted into the program. A visa is an immigration document that allows you to enter the country and stay for a specified length of time. You might need to show your language proficiency to be granted a visa. The process varies in each country, so contact leaders in your sponsor district or the local embassy with any questions.



Arrange your travel. In many countries, the Rotary district may organize your travel or recommend that you work with a specific travel agent. Before buying any tickets, ask local program organizers how and when you should make your travel arrangements and what type of tickets you'll need.



Obtain travel insurance. All students need to have travel insurance for the duration of their exchange. It must include at least medical and dental coverage in case you need immediate treatment while you're away. Ask your sponsor district about the minimum coverage required.



Gather immunization documents. Ask your local health department and consular officials to determine what immunizations are required or recommended for where you'll be traveling. Your host school may also require certain immunizations.



Have a medical examination. At this exam, you may want to ask for a card that includes your name, blood type, and what medications you use or are allergic to. Keep this card with you at all times during your exchange.



Make copies of all your documents. Ensure that your parents or guardians have copies of your passport, visa, travel insurance information, immunization record, and any other relevant documents. It's common for your Rotary counselor or a Youth Exchange officer in your host country to keep your original documents while you're there to ensure their safety.

Use this list before you travel to make sure you have the documents you'll need with you or readily accessible during your exchange.



Document	Who's responsible? (student or parent)	Who needs a copy? (club counselor or district chair)	Date obtained or completed
Passport			
Visa			
Airline ticket			
Travel insurance			
Immunization records			
Medical information			
Itinerary			
Host family address and contact details			

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

- ▶ Prepare for emergencies in consultation with the sponsor and host club and district and your parents or guardians, so you know who to contact and how to contact them. This is important if your flight is delayed, or you miss a connection while traveling.
- ▶ Talk to your parents and club leaders, before your trip, to be sure you understand how any stipend for the program (if available) will be transferred to you.
- ▶ Bring with you only a small amount of your host country's currency. Wait until you get there to get more cash. Ask your host club about the best way to access local currency.
- ▶ Have your host club or district and your family establish a route they all agree on in case you need to return from your exchange early.
- ▶ Ask your first host parents to send you their address, written in their language and the script of their country. Take it with you, and make sure your parent or guardian also has this information.



Focus on: **My travel plans (Make sure your parent or guardian also has this information!)**

Date, airport, and departure time information for my departure:

Name and contact information of the person meeting me at the airport:

Travel notes or questions I have:

PACK THE ESSENTIALS

Deciding what to bring for your time away can be difficult! Consider these suggestions before you start packing your bags.



Luggage

- ▶ Luggage should be light, durable, and easy to handle and to close. Wheeled luggage is helpful, but not necessary.
- ▶ Label each piece of your luggage with a contact name and a phone number and consider using a generic address or a parent/legal guardian's address instead of your home address. This helps keep your personal information secure while ensuring your luggage can be identified and returned if necessary.
- ▶ Pack less than you think you'll require. You need to be able to handle your luggage without assistance. Navigating airports can involve walking long distances with your bags.
- ▶ Keep your carry-on baggage as light as possible. Pack only essential items, including medications, basic toiletries, and one change of clothes. Wear a small bag inside your clothes to keep secure your passport, money, tickets, the telephone numbers of your host family and Youth Exchange chair, and other important papers. Be sure you can access your passport and tickets when needed.
- ▶ For medications, keep your original prescriptions to show customs officials, make the necessary declarations in advance, and be sure you're legally allowed to have the items. Some medications may be restricted in your host country and could be confiscated if you don't have authorization.
- ▶ Leave some space in your luggage. You'll buy things during your exchange and will need to return home with the same suitcases and carry-on bag.



Clothes and personal items

- ▶ Pack comfortable, coordinating clothes. Bring only clothes that you know you'll wear.
- ▶ Bring only a few pairs of shoes that are comfortable and suitable for different types of activities and weather. There may be formal occasions, but it's better to pack only what you're certain you'll need. You may also be able buy shoes in your host country — just confirm that your size is regularly available.
- ▶ Learn about how people your age usually dress in your host country. Some countries expect people to dress a specific way in public, at school, or at places of worship or sacred spaces. Consider how to incorporate your style in a way that respects your host country's customs.
- ▶ If you use eyeglasses, bring an extra pair and a copy of your prescription.
- ▶ If you wear contact lenses, pack extra cleaning solution in case the kind you need isn't available or is difficult to get. Bring a copy of your prescription in case you need to get more lenses or replace any that are lost or damaged.



Other items

- ▶ Consider bringing a journal to record your daily activities and meals, the places you visit, the friends you make, your thoughts and impressions, or anything else you want to remember for years to come about your exchange.
- ▶ Consider bringing small gifts from your home country for your host family or host club. They need not be expensive but should represent your family, heritage, community, or country.
- ▶ Find out whether you'll need power adapters or converters to use your electrical items in your host country. Ask your host club or district before bringing adapters from home.



Use this checklist as you pack:

Clothes

- Underwear
- Sleepwear
- Clothes for school
- Clothes for after school
- Clothes for a formal or religious event
- Clothes for athletics or exercise
- Comfortable shoes for walking or athletics
- Shoes for a formal or religious event
- Socks
- Swimsuit and cover-up if desired
- Clothes for cold weather (if necessary)

Toiletries

- Toothbrush, toothpaste, and dental floss
- Soap
- Deodorant
- Shampoo and conditioner
- Hairbrush
- Facial cleanser or moisturizer
- Sunscreen
- Bug repellent (if necessary)
- Contact lenses and solution, extra eyeglasses
- Shaving supplies
- Menstrual products
- Hand sanitizer
- Bandages, antibacterial ointment
- Medications, pain relievers, and vitamins (Ask your host counselor or district chair about any limits, restrictions, or prior authorizations needed for these.)

Miscellaneous items

- Mobile phone with charger
- Laptop or tablet with charger
- List of medications
- Bank card (with a memorized security code)
- Host family contact information
- Other emergency contact information
- Copy of passport and travel visa (in addition to the copies left with parents or guardians)
- Electronic adapter if necessary (refer to the advice above)
- Umbrella

“But before I knew it, it was time to pack up my things and leave. I arrived for my 2019-20 exchange in an unfamiliar country, meeting people I didn’t know, who spoke a language I didn’t speak well. But even though this was my most difficult path yet, I was at peace.”

— Mia Henderson,
a 2019-20 Youth
Exchange student
in Spain



Focus on: What should I pack that’s important to me?

3

RULES AND EXPECTATIONS

STATEMENT OF CONDUCT FOR WORKING WITH YOUTH

16

PROGRAM RULES

17

UNDERSTANDING THE RULES

18

The rules and expectations of the Rotary Youth Exchange program exist to protect everyone involved. They apply to students, club and district leaders, host families, volunteers, and members of the host club. All adults involved in Rotary Youth Exchange need to be part of Rotary's commitment to creating a safe, welcoming, and inclusive experience for all participants.

STATEMENT OF CONDUCT FOR WORKING WITH YOUTH

Rotary International strives to create and maintain a safe environment for all youth who participate in Rotary activities. To the best of their ability, Rotary club and Rotaract club members, their partners, and other volunteers must safeguard the children and young people they interact with and protect them from physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.

As a Rotary Youth Exchange student, you are an ambassador for your home country and are expected to act responsibly. Your conduct also reflects on your home Rotary district leaders and your family.

For more information about the rules and expectations for program leaders, review the [Rotary Youth Exchange Handbook](#) and Rotary Youth Exchange: Host Family Guide.



PROGRAM RULES

Participating in school and extracurricular activities, adhering to school rules, wearing a school uniform where it's required, improving your language skills, and completing all assignments are required to maintain your position in Rotary Youth Exchange. But they're also an important part of your growth toward your goals.

Some rules for Rotary Youth Exchange are outlined in the Rotary Code of Policies as minimum standards set by the RI Board of Directors. Districts can also implement additional rules on the basis of local laws and customs. All rules and expectations should be explained fully during your orientation sessions.

Rotary International rules for Youth Exchange participation:



You cannot drive a **motor** vehicle of any kind during your exchange, regardless of whether you have legal authorization in your home country. This includes but is not limited to all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), motorized scooters, bikes, and snow/watercraft.



If you're a long-term exchange student, you're required to attend school. Under the student visas most participants will have, not attending school could result in you having to leave the exchange early. You're also expected to make diligent efforts at school. A lack of participation, missed attendance, or behavior problems may result in your exchange ending early.



Rotary International will not tolerate any abuse or harassment.

Some common district rules and expectations (though they may have more than these):



The district may prohibit use of recreational drugs, or alcohol consumption even if you can legally obtain those items in the host country.



The district may implement a no-dating policy for their participants.



You cannot engage in any sexual activity during the exchange, even if you have reached the legal age of consent in your host country.



The districts require students to complete language courses or demonstrate basic language skills before their exchange.

These rules vary according to local culture, customs, and laws, and are generally designed to keep you safe and ensure fairness. Any additional rules should be disclosed to you during orientation and should outline specific consequences that may affect your place in the program.

UNDERSTANDING THE RULES

Although some rules may seem strict, they are the result of experience and reflect Rotary's commitment to protecting students. Disregarding them can lead to safety concerns or even being sent home.

It's crucial that you understand these rules and why they exist before you leave your home country. You should discuss the rules and any questions you have with the program leaders organizing your exchange.

The more you understand the details of your exchange, including the responsibilities of the sponsor and host club and district, the more you'll know what to do in different situations. Some anxiety about living with a family in a different country is natural, so it's important to be comfortable with the program before you leave.

If you have serious concerns about any aspect of the exchange, believe that you cannot follow the rules or meet the expectations, or don't understand the answers to your questions, have a serious talk with a trusted adult about whether you should take part in the exchange. Rotary Youth Exchange is a great opportunity, but you need to be fully aware of your responsibilities and prepared for the challenge.



Focus on: What questions do I have about the rules or expectations?

4

DURING THE EXCHANGE

FAMILY LIFE
19

FIRST-NIGHT
QUESTIONS
21

SCHOOL
23

GETTING INVOLVED
IN THE HOST
COMMUNITY
24

CHANGING HOST
FAMILIES
25

YOUR ROTARY
COMMITMENTS
25

FRIENDSHIPS AND
RELATIONSHIPS
26

Adjusting to your host community and culture is among the more challenging — and rewarding — phases of your experience. To make this adjustment easier, you can remain curious, ask questions without judgment, and prepare yourself for what to expect in your first few months and beyond.



FAMILY LIFE

Your hosts have been anticipating your arrival and will try to make you feel welcome in their home — but how you respond is up to you. Your flexibility and ability to accept new situations were some of the qualities the program leaders considered in selecting you, and you should be prepared to use those traits.

Discuss the household rules with your host family. Some families don't expect exchange students to do chores, while others expect everyone to tidy their bedcovers and share in tasks such as cleaning the kitchen after meals. Accepting the household tasks assigned to you will make the experience more enjoyable for everyone involved, even if you're not expected to do certain chores at home.

Consider this an opportunity to learn more about day-to-day living in this culture. Staying with a host family is part of what makes the Rotary Youth Exchange experience so special — you experience what life is *really* like in your host country.





Focus on: **What questions do I have for my host family?**

A large, empty rectangular box with a light blue border and rounded corners, intended for students to write their questions.



Focus on: **What are the names of everyone in my first host family?**

A large, empty rectangular box with a light blue border and rounded corners, intended for students to write the names of everyone in their first host family.

FIRST-NIGHT QUESTIONS

After a long journey to get to your host family's home, you may be feeling excited, nervous, or overwhelmed. If possible, have a discussion fairly soon after you arrive about house rules, expectations, etc. This will help you feel more comfortable with your host family and adjust to their routines. They will also appreciate the conversation to learn more about you.



The [North American Youth Exchange Network \(NAYEN\)](#), a group of Rotary Youth Exchange volunteers and leaders, has developed a list called First-Night Questions to help facilitate this conversation. Some examples are below, with space for your own questions.

Focus on: Possible questions for the first night

- ▶ How would you prefer to be addressed? Should I call you by your first name, family name, Mom, Dad, or another title?
- ▶ What are my daily responsibilities while living in your home?
- ▶ What is the procedure for laundering clothes?
- ▶ May I use household toiletries such as shampoo and toothpaste, or should I buy my own?
- ▶ May I put posters or pictures on the walls of my room? If yes, how do you want things attached?
- ▶ What transportation is available to me? (walking, riding the bus or train, riding a bicycle, being driven, riding with friends, etc.) Are there times or places that are unsafe for me to walk unescorted? Are there rules about traveling with friends?
- ▶ How can I best communicate with members of your family?
- ▶ What are the household expectations around using mobile phones or tablets?



Write in your own questions for the first night:

SCHOOL

Attending school and participating in school activities with your classmates is an important part of the long-term exchange program.

Host clubs and districts generally handle the registration and tuition arrangements with the local school. It's your responsibility to regularly attend school and be diligent about your studies. If you can choose your own classes, remember that taking too many may be difficult while you adjust to a new culture.



Attending school in a different country (especially in a different language) can be very challenging. Even if you are an outstanding student at home, your schoolwork will likely be more difficult than usual.

Do not delay in speaking with teachers, school administrators, or your Rotary counselor if you need help such as tutoring, extra language classes, or assistance with homework. If you're unable to meet the academic expectations, it may be necessary to end your exchange early.

Here are some tips to ease into your new school environment:

- ▶ Meet with the school counselor to discuss the school and its procedures.
- ▶ Ask your host siblings (if you have any) to help you meet other students at school.
- ▶ Learn how to travel to and from school safely.
- ▶ Find out if your school provides lunch or you're expected to bring your own.
- ▶ Take part in some school activities to enhance your overall experience.

“I realized the true impact of Rotary. I left my comfort zone, learned a new language, immersed myself in American culture, and shared my own culture in return. I told the community about Venezuela. They fell in love with my country. ... Eventually, the entire high school in a small town in Mississippi was collecting shoes, socks, and hats for Venezuelans leaving my home country.”

— Anniela Carracedo,
a 2019-20 Rotary
Youth Exchange
student in the U.S.

GETTING INVOLVED IN THE HOST COMMUNITY

As an exchange student, you should explore opportunities to learn about your host community and get involved in activities you're curious about. You may want to attend arts performances, learn to play a musical instrument, join a sports team, or accompany your host family on their favorite activities in the community.

Before leaving for your exchange, consider what activities you enjoy at home, such as exercise, sports, or hobbies — especially those that make you feel good about yourself. You shouldn't hesitate to try new experiences, but continuing to enjoy activities from home can help smooth your transition.

Ask your host club about other ways to get involved through Rotary during your exchange. Many clubs and districts support youth programs, such as [Interact clubs](#) and [Rotary Youth Leadership Awards \(RYLA\)](#), which help young people develop leadership skills, make a difference through service, and meet friends.

Many exchange students are invited to participate in these Rotary activities during their time away, and some are inspired to create new Interact clubs in their host community or after they return home.



Focus on: What activities would I enjoy doing in my host country?

CHANGING HOST FAMILIES

Long-term exchange students need to live with more than one host family during the year, so be prepared to make this adjustment. Staying with a different family allows you to gain a more expansive understanding of your host country's culture while offering new experiences and opportunities for friendships.

You'll be informed about the specific process of your host club's program, and your Rotary counselor may discuss any concerns with you to make the transition easier.

All families are different, so be sure to remain flexible as you acclimate to your new host family. You will want to discuss many of the same questions about the household that you talked about when you began your first host family experience. Refer to the **Family life** and **First-night questions** sections above.

“Rotary joined us together 25 years ago, and we are still here, celebrating a year that forever changed us. We stand for trust and friendship across borders, across differences cultures, languages, and religions. We are the world, just a smaller and more peaceful one.”

— [Emma Nääs](#),
a 1990-91 Rotary Youth Exchange student who reunited with other students 25 years later



YOUR ROTARY COMMITMENTS

Youth Exchange students are a part of the Rotary community, and your host club may ask that you take part in some Rotary events or activities during your exchange.

You may be asked to attend a Rotary or Rotaract club meeting or a district meeting, participate in a service project, get involved with an Interact club, attend a RYLA event, or give a speech at a Rotary function about your experience. Talking about your exchange with members in your host club or district is an important feature of the exchange and lets you be an ambassador on behalf of your home community and country.

You don't have to be an expert at public speaking — Rotary members are excited to learn about you and your experiences. Building a relationship with your Rotary community abroad will help you learn more about your host country, make new friends, and keep you connected long after your exchange.

FRIENDSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS

During your exchange, your friendships and other relationships provide emotional support and a sense of community. These connections are also an important part of how you'll learn and grow, influencing you during your time away as well as after your return home.

Approach each interaction with new people by being willing to learn about them. Think of cultural differences as opportunities for understanding. Your participation in social events, clubs, and group activities can be a great way to make friends. If you feel nervous about initiating conversations, remember that your peers are probably just as curious about you!



Your new friendships can be exciting and transformative, but it's important to remember the goals of your exchange and the rules you agreed to follow. Stay self-aware, be confident, and use critical thinking. This will help you make decisions in challenging situations or when new friends might influence you.

Peer pressure on social media, at school, or during extracurricular activities takes many forms, from online bullying to hazing to games that encourage you to engage in inappropriate or even dangerous behavior. While these types of games may seem relatively harmless, they can and do result in harmful consequences.

Remember that it is always OK to set firm boundaries and leave any situation that makes you uncomfortable. You can always speak to your Rotary or school counselor, host parents or other trusted adults about any situation that feels inappropriate or unsafe.

Just like at home, a friendship may develop into something more. Romantic feelings are a natural part of young adult life, including while you're taking part in an exchange. A romantic relationship, when approached with respect for boundaries, consent, and cultural considerations, can be enriching and exciting.

But be aware that dating can be more complicated during your exchange. If you identify as LGBTQ+, it's important to learn about your host country's culture, opinions and laws regarding same-sex relationships. It may not always be safe to be public about your sexual orientation. The age of consent can also differ from country to country. And never use dating apps in another country. Consider all these factors not only to keep yourself safe but also keep others safe.

Note that some districts have a no-dating policy for program participants. Be sure to ask about this if your host district doesn't address it during your orientation.

In districts without this rule, use caution and common sense. Remember that the focus of your exchange is cultural immersion and personal development. Balance any romantic interests with your commitment to these goals to ensure that any relationship enhances rather than distracts from your experience.

5

YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

ROTARY COUNSELORS
27

SCHOOL COUNSELORS
28

HOST FAMILY
29

Participating in Youth Exchange student can be a transformative experience that introduces you to a new culture and academic environment and spurs personal growth. But navigating it all can be very challenging. This is why you have a support system of trusted adults and volunteers to help you.

ROTARY COUNSELORS

Your Rotary counselor may be called an adviser or guide, depending on the district. You should meet with them in person or correspond with them by email or text regularly to discuss how you're adjusting, your language progress, your academic status, your experiences with your host family and new friends, your accomplishments and growth, and any feelings of homesickness or other challenges.

Some counselors may ask you for a monthly or quarterly report to keep them updated about your progress. Your counselor will also communicate with each host family parent regularly to support everyone in the home.

Contact your Rotary counselor whenever you need guidance about situations that you feel you cannot discuss with your host family or other adult program leaders.

Your Rotary counselor should be the same gender as you and cannot have any authority over your exchange. This means they won't be a member of your host family, a district or club Youth Exchange officer, or the school principal. Having an independent and objective Rotary counselor is important so you can feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues or challenges in an atmosphere of trust and safety. For students outside of the gender binary, they should discuss with their parents and host district what gender counselor they are most comfortable with.

If you and your Rotary counselor aren't a good match, ask to meet with another member of the host club or contact a leader in your sponsor or host district, who can ask that a different counselor be assigned to you.





Focus on: **my Rotary counselor**

Write your counselor's name, phone number, and email address, as well as any questions you have:

SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Administrators at your new school can assist with your academic needs and your adjustment to school abroad. Meet with your school counselor early in your exchange to discuss how to manage your coursework and any extracurricular activities.

Be sure you understand the school's rules, cafeteria or food policies, and any uniform requirements. Communicate any support you need to ensure your access to education. Request a tour of the school, ask to meet with other teachers or administrators who can support you, and identify resources such as tutoring or educational tools that can ease your transition.

Also try to meet with your school counselor and host parents together at the beginning of the school year to be sure the communication process is clear.

HOST FAMILY

Host families help bridge the gap between cultures and offer a nurturing environment as you adapt to new surroundings. They offer insight into local customs, traditions, and daily life that textbooks and classrooms can't capture. They can also provide support or a sense of belonging if you're homesick or face challenges.



Embrace the opportunity to build connections with your host family by sharing meals, having conversations, and participating in their routines. This can deepen your appreciation of the local culture and enhance your language skills. Be willing to learn from host family members and share your own background and experiences with them.

If you have a conflict with your host family that you cannot solve through conversation, be sure to let your Rotary counselor or Youth Exchange chair know. They can mediate a meeting to try to resolve the conflict or help you change host families if necessary.

Most students on long-term exchanges should expect to stay with more than one host family in any case. This offers a greater understanding of the host culture and broadens your experience. Many exchange students stay connected with their host families and even reconnect years after their exchange!

6

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

HOMESICKNESS

30

STAYING CONNECTED AND BEING ONLINE

31

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

32

YOUR PERSONALITY AND IDENTITY

32

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

33

COPING SKILLS PLAN

34

EARLY RETURN

36



While each exchange experience is unique, some challenges are very common. Remember that your Rotary counselor and other members of your support system can help. Don't hesitate to discuss any challenges with your Rotary or school counselor, your host family, or program leaders.

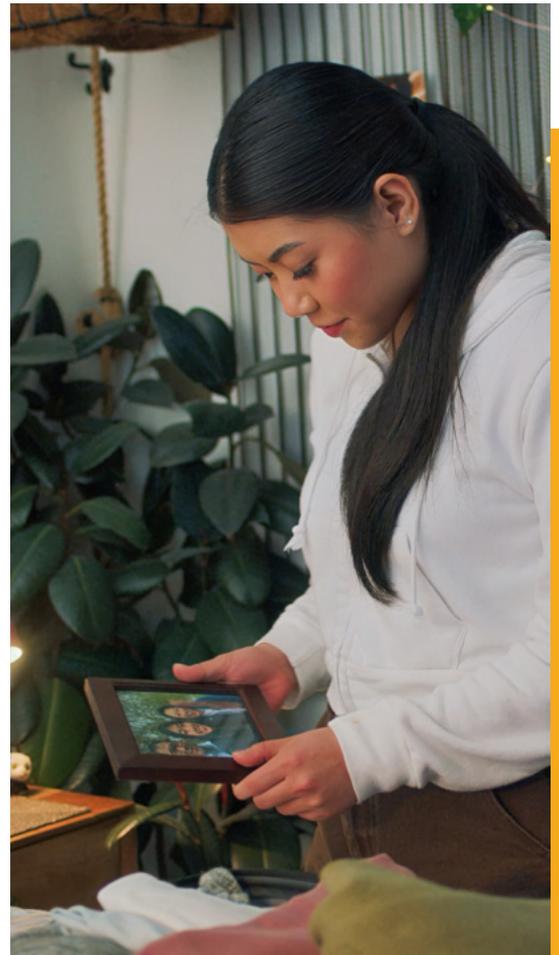
HOMESICKNESS

Most students feel some degree of homesickness. It's natural to miss the people and places that you know, especially at the beginning when everything is new or later on if your excitement begins to fade. You may feel lonely, especially if you're coping with other challenges that make you nostalgic for home.

It can be tempting to text or visit online a lot with your family and friends at home. This may actually make you feel more homesick, so try to find a good balance. Remember that you decided to become a Youth Exchange student to challenge yourself and try new things.

The best remedies for acute homesickness are to keep busy with a variety of activities or connect with someone who speaks your native language at school or in your local host community. Consider trying a new hobby or joining a community event. Your Rotary and school counselors can also help you cope with homesickness.

One way to prepare for these feelings is to create a coping skills plan. This kind of plan leads you through the action you can take when you feel homesick. Use the template below to develop yours.



STAYING CONNECTED AND BEING ONLINE

Although you don't want to use all your leisure time talking with people at home, it's important not to neglect those relationships. Scheduling time for calls or video chats is a way to share your experiences and stay up to date about what's happening at home. You can also share any concerns or challenges you have so your family can help you and work with your Rotary counselor to support you.



Talk with your Rotary counselor, host family, and your parents or guardians about dedicating time for this weekly or monthly. Make sure you understand any rules or expectations your host family has about when or how to use your phone or other electronic devices. Your host family, for example, may prefer not to use personal devices during meals or during family activities in the evenings or on weekends.

Even if you usually use a significant amount of time on your mobile device reading and posting on social media or playing

video games, your host family and friends want to enjoy time with you during your relatively short time abroad. Commit to connecting with your new community in person, while also having an agreement about when and how often you need time alone or to connect online.

Be mindful of the content you post on social media. Don't share identifying details about where you're staying or personal information about yourself. Remember that your posts may reach people other than you intended, and remember that you're an ambassador for your home country and Rotary.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Regardless of how much you prepared beforehand, adjusting to a new language requires daily practice.

Misunderstandings and communication challenges are not unusual, so do your best and ask for clarification when necessary. Speak clearly and slowly and be patient with yourself. At times you may need help from someone fluent in your native language — a teacher, interpreter, or visitor. Have a dictionary or translation app handy on your phone to help facilitate discussions.

Remember that it's natural to feel frustrated as you work to improve your language skills. Although you may rely heavily on technology at the beginning of your exchange, you won't become proficient unless you practice written and verbal communication. Don't stop trying — your effort will be a source of pride when you can have everyday conversations with your new friends and host family.

Before your exchange, ask your sponsor district what the host district's expectations are for language proficiency and if there are specific times when you're expected to reach certain benchmarks.



YOUR PERSONALITY AND IDENTITY

Youth Exchange can be a transformative experience as you become capable of handling more responsibility and independence.

You may find yourself shifting from being quiet or shy to being more assertive or outgoing. You may also find yourself questioning aspects of your own culture, background, or identity that you hadn't considered before.

This is a natural part of any exchange experience. If you have questions or want to discuss what you're feeling, you have trusted adults and peers who will gladly talk with you. Rotary Youth Exchange alumni are also great resources because they have experienced the process personally.

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Mental health challenges are very common, especially when people are in new situations far from home. Your host and sponsor districts are required to provide mental health resources and emergency services for students who need them.

Planning ahead is the best way to prepare yourself for the challenges of a year abroad. Work with your parents or guardians and your program leaders to develop a system to cope with these challenges. In the template below, include information about trusted adults you can talk to, coping skills, and a communications plan.

Before you create your plan, make sure you consider these questions:

What are your coping skills? — These can be any activities that produce joy, offer a temporary distraction, or ease strong emotions, especially when mental or emotional challenges arise. It's important to think about this before your exchange so you have a strategy ready. Identify several activities that help you regulate your emotions, including some you can do on your own and some that can be done with others.

Who are your trusted adults? — These are people you're comfortable sharing your feelings and thoughts with. You trust them with sensitive and important information, and you feel safe and supported with them. At the beginning of your exchange, this may be someone at home instead of your Rotary counselor. That's OK. The longer you're away, the more your support system will expand to include local adults, such as members of your host club, teachers and school administrators, and members of your host family.

How do I prefer to communicate? — This will help you determine an effective communication style for you, particularly when you're dealing with challenges. Your usual communications plan might include time each week to address any concerns or questions with your host family. But you can also define in advance when it might be necessary to involve your parents or guardians or seek additional support from other family members or district leaders.

It's important that you complete your coping skills plan before your exchange. Be sure to have your Rotary counselor, host family, and parents or guardians review it so you all have a shared understanding about how you'll approach challenges.

COPING SKILLS PLAN



1. How do I know when I'm feeling overwhelmed?

What emotions do I have?

What does it feel like in my body?

How might it appear to others when I am feeling upset, nervous, etc.?

2. Are my thoughts based on feelings or facts?

3. How am I breathing right now? Feel your breath going in and out.

Breathe in for four seconds.

Breathe out for four seconds.

Repeat as often as necessary.

4. What are five coping skills I can implement alone?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

5. What are two coping skills I can use when I'm with others?

1. _____
2. _____



6. Who are three trusted adults I can talk to?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

7. What is the easiest way for me to communicate difficult feelings?

8. How often do I feel I need to call, text, or video chat with people at home during the first four weeks?

9. What is the minimum number of times I am comfortable communicating with people at home after the first month?



Use the remaining space to add in any other coping skills, trusted adults, or activities that help regulate your emotions.

“Living in Japan and returning ‘home’ to Canada afforded me many experiences. Perhaps most importantly, my experiences acquainted me with the qualities of resilience and loving kindness – two qualities I am proud to possess.”

– Julia Chalifoux,
1997-98 Rotary
Youth Exchange
student

This coping skills plan has been reviewed and agreed upon by

(have your Rotary counselor agree here). Share it with your host family and your parents or guardians at home, too.

EARLY RETURN

There may be instances when a problem arises that cannot be solved, your mental health declines, or you engage in a serious violation of the rules you agreed to. In these types of cases, the host club may make the difficult decision that you should return home early.

It’s vital that students and Rotary members and nonmember volunteers cooperate and keep communicating. The host and sponsor clubs or districts, your Rotary counselor, your host family, and your family at home should all be fully informed about the circumstances surrounding any early return. Before your departure, your host club or district and your family should also have established an agreed-on route for your return home.

Although you might be anxious about the reactions of your family and friends to your early return, if the district decides to take this step, it is usually in your best interest to be at home.



YOUTH PROTECTION AND SAFETY

ROTARY'S COMMITMENT

37

IMPORTANT SAFETY DEFINITIONS

38

REPORTING A YOUTH PROTECTION CONCERN

39

LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

40

SAFETY TIPS

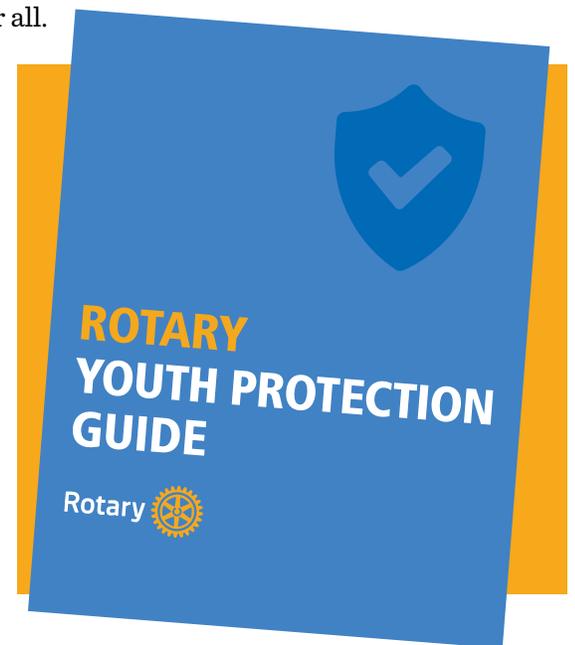
40



ROTARY'S COMMITMENT

The safety and well-being of young people and youth program participants are Rotary's highest priority. Youth Exchange leaders and volunteers strive to offer experiences that are safe and positive for young people and that align with Rotary's commitment to creating welcoming and inclusive environments for all.

Rotary is also committed to maintaining an environment that is free of harassment. We take all reports of misconduct seriously, and it is the responsibility of all Rotary members and nonmember volunteers to ensure that any incidents that involve youth and program participants — including all allegations of abuse or harassment — are promptly reported to local authorities and to Rotary International.



Our comprehensive approach to youth protection includes:

- ▶ No tolerance for abuse or harassment of young people
- ▶ Policies that prevent misconduct and that outline how to respond to grooming behaviors and abuse that involve youth and other program participants
- ▶ Mandatory youth protection training for program leaders
- ▶ A dedicated and trained staff that uses a trauma-informed approach when receiving and responding to allegations or reports of sexual abuse or harassment
- ▶ A certification process that requires Rotary districts involved in Rotary Youth Exchange to have:
 - ✓ Student, family, and volunteer training in abuse prevention
 - ✓ Volunteer screenings that include an application, criminal background check, and reference checks
 - ✓ A process for reporting allegations of abuse and harassment to Rotary and local law enforcement
 - ✓ District-specific youth protection policies
 - ✓ Policy compliance reviews conducted by Rotary staff members

IMPORTANT SAFETY DEFINITIONS

You deserve to feel safe during your exchange. Identifying inappropriate behavior will help you feel confident to talk to a trusted adult if you ever experience something that makes you uncomfortable. Learn these important definitions:

Consent — An informed, knowing, and voluntary decision to engage in an activity or behavior.

Sexual abuse — Engaging in or arranging implicit or explicit sexual acts. This includes pressuring someone to perform a sexual act alone, or sexually engaging directly with another person of any age or gender through force or coercion, or with anyone who is unable to give consent. Any sexual activity between a legal adult and a minor or youth program participant, or any nonconsensual sexual activity between peers, is considered sexual abuse. Sexual abuse can also include offenses that don't involve touching, such as voyeurism, indecent exposure, stalking, electronic harassment, or showing a young person sexual or pornographic material.

Sexual harassment — Sexual advances, requests for sexual acts, or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is unwanted or directed at someone who is unwilling or unable to consent. It can be physical or verbal, and even occur in the form of electronic communication, such as in text messages or on social media. In some cases, sexual harassment precedes sexual abuse and is used by sexual predators to desensitize someone or accustom them to inappropriate behavior. Examples of sexual harassment include:

- ▶ Sexual nicknames or jokes, references to sexual conduct, gossip about someone's sex life, or comments about a person's sexual activity, deficiencies, or prowess
- ▶ Giving private or secret gifts, including those of a sexual nature
- ▶ Verbal comments or statements of a sexual nature
- ▶ Display of sexually suggestive objects or images
- ▶ Requests for sexual acts
- ▶ Sexual leering or whistling
- ▶ Inappropriate physical contact, such as intentionally brushing against a person
- ▶ Obscene language or gestures
- ▶ Suggestive or insulting comments

Grooming — Establishing an emotional connection with someone to lower their inhibitions and gain their trust with the intent to be sexually abusive. This can look like:

- ▶ Seeking out individual time — arranging to spend time alone with a young person
- ▶ Isolating someone — separating a young person, physically or emotionally, to gain control and undermine their relationships with friends, family, or others
- ▶ Offering special treatment — showing favoritism, giving extra attention to one or more young people, or rewarding certain behavior
- ▶ Keeping secrets — encouraging young people to lie, keep secrets, communicate privately, or hide a relationship
- ▶ Touching — making physical contact, such as hugging, that may gradually become inappropriate

- ▶ Desensitizing — treating inappropriate behavior as acceptable, normal, or insignificant
- ▶ Forcing consent — ignoring or invalidating a young person’s right to object to behavior that makes them uncomfortable or violates policies
- ▶ Giving gifts — offering gifts or rewards, which may seem appropriate at first but can escalate to inappropriate or sexually explicit gifts

Community grooming — Manipulating or convincing others into thinking that an offender is caring, kind, and respectable with the goal of causing members of the community to ignore warning signs of predatory behavior.



If you ever feel uncomfortable, don’t hesitate to contact a trusted adult such as your Rotary or school counselor, your parents or guardians, or your host club or district leaders. Your safety and well-being are the main priority during your exchange.

REPORTING A YOUTH PROTECTION CONCERN

If you ever believe there has been a policy violation, you suspect or witness misconduct, or you experience a situation that makes you feel unsafe, uncomfortable, or unsure, it is critical that you report these concerns so they can be addressed carefully, promptly, and thoroughly. Before you submit a report:

1. Ensure that you are in a safe environment to do so
2. Contact local law enforcement immediately in case of emergency
3. Talk to a trusted adult for support

The most effective way to report a concern is to contact an adult who is part of your support system abroad, including your Rotary counselor, school counselor, your host family, or a program leader. You can also call one of the support hotline numbers you received during your orientation.

Reporting abuse or a youth protection concern can be difficult. You might feel shame or embarrassment or wrongly blame yourself. You might hesitate to make a report because of worries about retaliation or other negative consequences. Cultural norms and social pressure can also discourage reports about sensitive topics such as alleged sexual abuse or harassment and allegations that involve authority figures.

Even if you are hesitant, know that Rotary will not tolerate any abuse or harassment of young people, and there are trusted adults who want to help you.

If you feel you cannot talk to a trusted adult in your host country or your parents, you can contact a Youth Protection staff member at Rotary International. Our staff members are trained to receive reports of abuse or misconduct that involves youth, and each situation will be handled with care and confidentiality.

You can write to us at youthprotection@rotary.org or call +1 866-976-8279 from 08:00-16:00 Chicago time (UTC-5 during daylight saving time or UTC-6 during standard time in the United States). You can also submit a report online, including anonymously, on Rotary’s youth protection homepage rotary.org/youthprotection.

LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

Part of Rotary’s zero tolerance for abuse and harassment is any LGBTQ+ discrimination. This is broadly defined as any conduct — verbal or physical — that threatens, denigrates, insults, or offends a person or group based on protected characteristics. It’s important that you feel safe and comfortable as you experience a new country that may have different customs, laws and cultural expectations about gender identity and sexual orientation.

Contact your Rotary counselor or Youth Exchange officer with any concerns related to your identity or accommodations you might need for your health, safety, and well-being during your exchange.

Additional information on creating welcoming and respectful environments can be found in the Related Resources section of our Youth Protection page (rotary.org/youthprotection). If you have concerns about your Youth Exchange experience that relate directly to your sexual orientation or gender identity, don’t hesitate to contact Rotary International.

SAFETY TIPS

- ▶ If you feel uncomfortable, whether because of an adult or another student, tell a trusted adult immediately.
- ▶ Pack your own suitcase, and never carry items abroad for others.
- ▶ Always have with you the telephone numbers of your host family, emergency services, and your Rotary counselor.
- ▶ Follow the instructions of your group leader, teacher, or other experts, such as tour guides, when you travel.
- ▶ Tell your host parents where you’re going and what time you’ll be back. Be sure to update them if your plans change.
- ▶ When you travel outside your host home, make sure you go with a friend or a member of your host family.
- ▶ If you do get lost or separated from the people you know, go to a shop or place where you’ll be seen by lots of people to ask for directions.
- ▶ Keep your money or other important documents such as a passport hidden in an inside pocket, concealed money belt, or something similar — choose what’s comfortable for you.
- ▶ Make sure you know any person who is coming to meet you. Never get into a vehicle unless it is with a person you arranged to meet.
- ▶ Always look and behave confidently, especially while traveling.



Focus on: **What are other safety tips I've learned from my peers or training?**

8

AFTER THE EXCHANGE

READJUSTMENT CHALLENGES

43

CONTINUING YOUR ROTARY EXPERIENCE

45

Your Rotary Youth Exchange adventure doesn't need to end when you return home! In fact, the new perspectives and growth that you've experienced will likely influence the rest of your life.

Although you'll be busy readjusting to life at home, maintaining your connection to your host families and new friends abroad will reinforce what you learned and your global understanding. Keeping in contact with people who were important during your exchange will also help make your return easier.

Your sponsor district should arrange a meeting to talk about your experience, discuss how to make reacclimating to life at home easier, and connect you with resources and opportunities to help you share your experience and build on it, when you're ready.



READJUSTMENT CHALLENGES

Your readjustment to your home community is a crucial aspect of the exchange process. Just as you faced the challenge of adapting to a new culture, you may feel disoriented upon your return home (a feeling sometimes called reverse culture shock). You might be surprised that you have a different perspective on your home culture, friends, and school life. This is very common.

Your sponsor district leaders, your counselors, and former Youth Exchange participants can all help you integrate your new experiences and mitigate those challenges. You can also use these tips:

- ▶ **Be aware of your thoughts and feelings.** It's OK to struggle to accept that your life at home doesn't feel exactly the same. You've had different experiences and have changed and grown. Your life at home will be different because of this. Be sure to acknowledge the parts of your life that you missed while you were away and be thoughtful about people, places, or activities that feel different.
- ▶ **Share your excitement!** When you first return, your family, friends, and Rotary sponsors will be eager to learn about your experiences. Sharing those is a great

way to stay connected to your exchange and teach people at home about your host community. Give a presentation to your sponsor club, ask to present to interested students at school, or plan a party where you can share your favorite foods, games, or music from your host culture.

- ▶ **Connect with others who understand.** After some time, you may miss your host family and friends abroad. People at home may also be less interested in your experiences. If you feel lonely and want people to share your experiences with, you'll find solidarity in your fellow alumni. Connecting with an alumni association or Rotex group is a great way to make friends who have had similar challenges and triumphs and can share how they have incorporated those experiences into daily life. Ask your sponsor club or district to connect you with former Rotary Youth Exchange students.

- ▶ **Stay positive.** Just as the beginning of your exchange presented challenges, so may your return home. Be patient with yourself and others. Think about your time away and why you chose to take part in Rotary Youth Exchange. Consider what new experience you want to challenge yourself with next, and work with your newly expanded Rotary community to take the next steps.





Focus on: **After my exchange**

What do I miss most about my host country?

How can I stay in contact with my friends there and my host families?

How can I honor my host country's culture here at home?

Which stories do I want to share with my friends and family now that I'm home?

What do I wish people at home understood about my host country?

Which other former exchange students can I connect with online or in my community?

CONTINUING YOUR ROTARY EXPERIENCE

You're now a part of the Rotary community. What are some good ways to stay involved?

We've mentioned Rotary Youth Exchange alumni, called Rotex a few times. [Rotex](#) is a society of Rotary Youth Exchange alumni that engages with inbound and outbound students to improve their exchange experiences. Rotex groups support clubs and exchange students by mentoring students during their exchanges, organizing trips and events for students, and representing exchange students around the world.

You can also get involved with other youth programs in Rotary. Join an [Interact club](#) for students ages 12-18 to serve your community or take part in a [RYLA](#) event to further develop your leadership skills.

If you're 18 or older, consider joining a [Rotaract](#) or [Rotary](#) club, such as an e-club designed to engage alumni, or starting a new Rotaract or Rotary club.

“All the alumni appreciated the opportunity to reconnect with Rotary, to relive the beautiful experience of their exchange abroad, and to know that there is a way to give back to Rotary for all the difference it made in their lives. This was their most frequent testimony: Rotary changed their lives.”

— [Fernando Pinto Nercelles](#), a former Youth Exchange student who started a Rotary club with fellow alumni



Focus on: How can I stay involved with Rotary?

Questions or concerns?

Write to Rotary International staff at youthexchange@rotary.org, or visit the [Youth Exchange webpage](#) for more information.

We at Rotary International wish you an incredible exchange and happy adventures!

9

PARENT AND GUARDIAN RESOURCES

SAFETY

46

SUPERVISION, GUIDANCE, AND COUNSELING

47

TRAVEL DURING AN EXCHANGE

47

VISITING THE STUDENT DURING THEIR EXCHANGES

47

ACADEMIC CREDIT

48



Share this section with your parents or guardians, who will have many questions about Rotary Youth Exchange. They can also write to us at youthexchange@rotary.org.

SAFETY

The safety and well-being of young people and youth program participants are Rotary's highest priority. Rotary districts that want to participate in our youth exchange program need to complete a thorough certification process that ensures they have youth protection policies and a crisis management plan in accordance with Rotary International guidelines.

Students receive guidance from both their sponsor and host districts about rules to keep them safe and the best safety practices. Districts may require students to sign an agreement pledging to avoid activities such as drinking or drug use that could lead to dangerous situations.

Exchange students are not allowed to operate or drive a motor vehicle of any kind during their exchange under any circumstances. This includes but is not limited to all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), motorized scooters, bikes, and snow/watercraft. They also cannot own a motor vehicle in their host country.

Students shouldn't travel outside the immediate area of the host club community without permission from their parents or guardians as well as from the host club and district.

We strongly discourage participation in extreme sports. Students who want to participate need written permission from their parents or guardians as well as from the host districts. They should also obtain additional adequate insurance.

The Youth Exchange staff members monitor conditions in our partner countries. If a country is determined to be a high-risk area, Rotary restricts exchanges to affected regions or countries.

Sometimes the unexpected happens while on exchange such as a natural disaster, civil unrest, or regional or global health outbreak. Districts participating in Rotary Youth Exchange must have a crisis management plan in place. This plan outlines clear communication and action steps to be taken in case of an emergency. This includes how they could best keep program participants safe and communicate with all necessary parties, including participants' parents or legal guardians, sponsor districts, and Rotary International.

SUPERVISION, GUIDANCE, AND COUNSELING

Rotary clubs and districts use great caution in selecting the host families that students will live with. This includes a thorough vetting, screening and interview process by the host club or district. Because the exchange is established through local Rotary clubs, club members are directly involved in the welfare of these students.

Students often attend Rotary club meetings and get to know members who are leaders in their communities. Students who are away from home are often more comfortable knowing that members of their host club are available to help and offer guidance.



TRAVEL DURING AN EXCHANGE

Youth Exchange is not a tourist program, but supervised travel is sometimes available with a host family or members of Rotary clubs. Some Rotary districts organize optional group tours, which the students pay for. The host district needs written permission in advance from the parents or guardians for any travel outside the local host community and needs to provide specific details about the location, itineraries, sleeping accommodations, costs, and contact information.

VISITING STUDENTS DURING THEIR EXCHANGES

Some districts allow a student's parents or guardians to visit during their exchange. Both the host district and club would need to approve any visit beforehand. Because Youth Exchange programs are managed at the district level, some districts will have stricter policies than others. For example, some districts won't allow families to visit during the first six months or at holidays. Be sure to ask during the orientation process to be sure that everyone understands the policy.

ACADEMIC CREDIT

Some host schools accept academic credits from foreign schools, but this varies by school system and host school. Be sure to make any necessary arrangements with your local school administrators prior to the student's departure for their exchange.



The exchange experience usually enhances a student's resume and university applications. Most postsecondary institutions regard the exchange experience as one that expanded the student's capabilities, motivation, and perspective. Find out when the student applies to a university if it will offer any foreign language credit.

Being in a new country has a powerful effect on your child's maturity as they manage their finances and make decisions. They develop more confidence and independence and a greater understanding of the life and culture in other places. And they become proficient in the language of their host country. They meet people and experience situations that they wouldn't encounter at home.

All of this makes them better prepared to handle postsecondary training or university life. For many, it also helps determine what they want to accomplish in their futures.



Focus on: Questions from parents or guardians

Write any questions you have about your child's exchange so you can ask them at a meeting or predeparture orientation session.

ROTARY RESOURCES

Rotary

rotary.org/en/about-rotary/our-leaders/international-offices

Youth Exchange webpage

rotary.org/en/our-programs/youth-exchanges

Rotary Youth Exchange Handbook

my.rotary.org/en/document/youth-exchange-handbook

Interact clubs

rotary.org/en/get-involved/interact-clubs

Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA)

rotary.org/en/our-programs/rotary-youth-leadership-awards

Youth Protection

my.rotary.org/en/knowledge-and-resources/resources-and-reference/youth-protection

Rotex

rotex.org/who-we-are/

Rotaract

rotary.org/en/get-involved/rotaract-clubs

Rotary

rotary.org/en/get-involved/rotary-clubs

STORIES/BLOGS

Mia Henderson

blog.rotary.org/2021/07/22/my-rotary-youth-exchange-to-spain/

Anniela Carracedo

blog.rotary.org/2022/05/20/my-rotary-youth-exchange-venezuela-to-the-united-states/

Emma Nääs

blog.rotary.org/2016/08/19/rotary-youth-exchange-tour-reunites-25-years-later/

Julia Chalifoux

blog.rotary.org/2019/10/08/returning-home-again-how-rotary-youth-exchange-builds-resilience/

Fernando Pinto Nercelles

blog.rotary.org/2021/10/01/rotary-youth-exchange-alumni-form-new-club/



One Rotary Center
1560 Sherman Avenue
Evanston, IL 60201-3698 USA
Rotary.org

752-EN—(525)