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Frequently Asked Questions – Hosting a Homestay - what do I need to know as a homestay host?

Homestays

A homestay is when you provide accommodation for a young person in your home, while they are visiting your area. Such visits can take place for a variety of reasons. For example:

- An educational visit by a school group from a different part of the UK or a foreign country.
- A youth orchestra or sports team touring or taking part in an event.

Sometimes homestays are part of an exchange, where the visitors act as hosts back at their homes at another time.

Homestays can provide rich learning and development opportunities for young people. They can help them develop self-esteem, self-confidence and independence, learn about other people and places, gain an insight into different cultures, or practise a foreign language.

Organising the homestay

There are a variety of ways in which homestays are arranged:

- A school, or other establishment, which is hosting a visiting group, might ask parents or other members of the community to be homestay hosts.
- There are agencies that organise exchange visits and homestays on behalf of groups visiting certain areas, and recruit local families to act as homestay hosts.
- Occasionally parents of young people planning a visit, or the young people themselves, may make private arrangements with potential homestay hosts.

If you are approached by a school, other establishment or agency to act as a homestay host, then that organisation has a responsibility to ensure that any

young person who stays with you will be safe in your care. You may therefore be asked to provide information about yourself and any other adults in your home, and about the facilities and support you can provide. Sometimes this will involve a criminal records check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

Before making any arrangements with an agency or organisation with which you are not familiar, you should make enquiries to satisfy yourself about them.

The homestay organiser (whether this is a school, other establishment or agency) should inform you of their expectations of you as a host and provide you with information about your guest(s) – e.g. their contact details and those of their parents, and any dietary or medical needs that they may have. They should also provide a 24/7 contact during the homestay in case of any concerns or emergencies. As part of the same planning process, you should discuss any concerns with the organiser, and make clear if you have any expectations of guests (such as no smoking).

This exchange of information and clarification of expectations is equally important for private arrangements made directly with a young person or their parent,

It could help your guest(s) to look forward to the homestay if you contact them in advance, perhaps with photos and information about your home and your family.

If a guest is from overseas and speaks a different language, it can be helpful to have handy a dictionary and phrase book, or translation software, and to learn a few simple phrases to help them feel welcome.

Hosting the homestay

It is likely that your guest(s) will feel nervous when they arrive, and so you will want to do your best to make them feel welcome. You should, where appropriate, include them in all normal family activities, such as housework, play and entertainment, shopping and trips out. This will not only help to make them feel welcome and included, it will make the experience richer for them. What is normal and everyday for one family can be novel and interesting for someone from a different background. However, you should check with the homestay organiser (or your guest's parents where the arrangement is a private one) that any activities you plan to do (e.g. cycling, swimming, adventure activities) are acceptable.

If you intend to transport your guest(s) in a private car, then you should check with the homestay organiser whether they are happy with this. This is particularly important if the car is to be driven by a young person.

You are responsible for supervising your guest(s) in order to ensure that they are safe and secure. This does not mean that you necessarily have to be with them at all times, but you should know where they are and who they are with, and you may want to set boundaries and make occasional checks to see that all is well. A good guide is to supervise them in the same way that you would supervise your own children of the same age.

If you are not going to be around for a significant period of time (e.g. if you go out to work while they are at home) you may hand over supervision to another adult, provided that the organiser of the homestay is aware of this.

You should ensure that your guest(s) have privacy when they need it, and that they are able to contact a parent, teacher or homestay organiser whenever they wish to do so.

During the homestay, you should adhere to any agreements that you have made with the organisation that arranged the homestay, or the parents of your guest(s). If there is an unexpected change (e.g. in the facilities you can provide, or the adults staying in your home), you should discuss this with the homestay organiser as soon as possible.

During a homestay, it is normal for the homestay organiser or a member of staff from the visiting establishment to occasionally call at your home to check that all is well.

If a guest becomes sick, behaves unreasonably or show signs of being unhappy, you should inform the homestay organiser. Sometimes having a guest staying in your home can become stressful for everyone involved, including members of your family whose routines may be affected. You should be aware of this possibility and do your best to ease any strains, and to watch out for any signs of friction or unacceptable behaviour.

You should not allow the use of illegal drugs, or underage drinking, by anyone in the household during the homestay.

Young people away from home can often develop close relationships with other young people or adults. This is normal and is usually a healthy part of growing up and becoming independent. If you have any concerns that such a relationship is becoming inappropriate, you should immediately intervene or discuss it with the homestay organiser.

Sometimes a young person who has developed a trusting relationship will confide about something that is worrying them or that has happened to them. Again, this is normal. However, if a young person confides about abuse that they have suffered, you should tell them that you cannot promise complete confidentiality, and you must report it to social services or to a senior member of staff at their school or organisation.

