

## Pre-Departure Orientation Guidelines

### Overview

In keeping with U.S. State Department regulations, all international representatives must provide students with a Pre-Departure Orientation meeting. In addition, sharing this information and speaking with your students directly will greatly reduce the number of problems and misunderstandings during the year. In most cases, students who are well prepared have more successful exchange programs! The Pre-Departure Orientation meeting offered by your organization should include:

- A summary of all operating procedures, rules and regulations governing student participation in the exchange program.
- Contact information for the participant's Local Coordinator and host family, (if available and as provided by CIEE.)
- A detailed summary of travel arrangements, including return airfare.
- Information about the orientation provided by CIEE in the U.S. including an agenda, site address, and emergency contact information.
- Age and language appropriate information on how to identify and report sexual abuse or exploitation.

In addition, please be certain to review these important topics with participants:

- **Who is CIEE?**
- **High School Policies: Grade Level & Graduation**
- **Policy on Continuing Academic Study in the U.S.**
- **Program Rules**
- **Managing Expectations**
- **Effective Communication**
- **Student Support**
- **Budgeting your Money**
- **Technology & Communication**



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### Who is CIEE?

Founded in 1947, CIEE: The Council on International Educational Exchange is the leading U.S. non-governmental international education organization. CIEE creates and administers programs that allow high school and university students and educators to study and teach abroad.

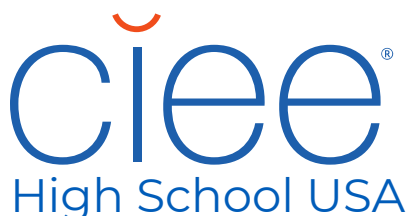
Among many activities, CIEE administers Work & Travel USA programs for over 40,000 participants, Trainee programs for 5,000 participants, High School Programs for 1,200 participants, 119 Study Abroad programs in 40 host countries, and Teach Abroad programs in Chile, China, the Dominican Republic, South Korea, Spain, and Thailand. Please visit [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org) for more information.

For all High School USA Exchange participants, CIEE acts as the visa sponsor. In this capacity, CIEE provides support and supervision to students during their program. CIEE also provides accident and liability insurance coverage.

**Host Families:** Who you will live and bond with over your semester or year of exchange in the US!

**Local Coordinators:** Your point person in your community. Ask your Local Coordinator for help when you need it and ask them questions when you have them!

**Support:** Your team in Portland, here to answer any questions you have and help you work through problems. Available 24/7 at 1-800-448-9944



## Pre-Departure Orientation Guidelines

### High School Policies: Grade Level & Graduation

All participants of the High School USA Program should be aware that the host high school will determine the appropriate grade level for the student based on their curriculum. Additionally, a high school diploma is never guaranteed to exchange students, even when a student is placed in the 12th grade.

CIEE does make every effort to ensure that students are enrolled in classes that are appropriate for their level of study. However, CIEE will not change a placement in order to accommodate a different grade level. Many high schools in the U.S. only permit exchange students to enroll in 11th grade, for example, as a school-wide policy.

### Policy on Continuing Academic Study in the U.S.

Students should be aware that the USA High School Program is a 5 or 10-month cultural and academic exchange program. All participants receive J-1 visa sponsorship through CIEE for a maximum of 10 months. Each student's program terminates two weeks after their school end date. At this time, all host family responsibility, supervision, and medical insurance ends. CIEE advises that students depart the U.S. at this time.

During their exchange program, many students express interest in pursuing future study in the U.S., either at the secondary school or collegiate level. Some students even participate in the SAT or TOEFL exams during their stay in order to gain admittance to U.S. colleges and universities. While students are required to maintain a C+ minimum grade point average, students should aim to balance time between studies, school activities, host family, and community. Any student who devotes excessive time to the pursuit of advanced study may be placed on probation and risks disciplinary action.

### Program Rules

Students are responsible for following the program rules signed upon submission of their application. Failure to follow program rules will lead to action of the CIEE disciplinary process, which includes written warnings, probation, as well as possible dismissal from the program. CIEE's Support Team communicates directly with stakeholders whenever possible to clearly outline the expectations, policies, and rules.

## Pre-Departure Orientation Guidelines

### Managing Expectations

It is very important that participants and families are aware of the benefits and requirements of the program to create appropriate expectations. CIEE High School USA is a cultural exchange program, involving a two-way process in which both the student and host family benefits and learns from their experiences. Families are not paid to receive students, and schools do not receive extra funding for accepting exchange students. Students must demonstrate the skills, motivation, and maturity that are crucial to success in the program. Once in the U.S., students are expected to be active in all aspects of family and community life.

Here are some important recommendations for how to make the High School USA Exchange program an enjoyable and successful experience for all involved:

#### **Students** should:

- Be open with the host family about themselves and their culture
- Be good representatives of their country
- Be flexible, adaptable, and positive
- Participate in host family, school, and community activities
- Accept and show respect for the host culture and the host family
- Be open and honest with the host family about problems
- Talk to their Local Coordinator about any problems that cannot be solved with the host family

#### **Natural parents** should:

- Be supportive of their child's participation in the exchange program
- Try to understand all sides of a situation if a problem arises
- Help their child budget money
- Allow their child and host family to develop a relationship
- Try not to call too often to allow the child to adapt more quickly to their new surroundings
- Give their child a chance to make mistakes, to be challenged and to grow

## Pre-Departure Orientation Guidelines

### Keep in mind:

- America is diverse, but mostly composed of small, rural towns
- There is no typical family: composition, race, religion, socioeconomic status
- Host families are volunteers
- There is no typical Local Coordinator
- Academics are very important
- Students cannot drive and often have to rely on others for transportation
- Conflict is normal and necessary
- Culture shock happens
- Students and natural parents need to have space, both physical and technologically, in order for the student to learn and grow

### Small Towns

Students should dispel their stereotypes of the US, town sizes and communities vary, and many American communities are in rural, small towns. The majority of placements are in suburban, rural, or semi-rural areas. Students and natural families are encouraged to research the US, their region and their town, and approach this unique and personal experience with open minds.

### Rules

Every family has its own household routine and expectations regarding the responsibilities and behavior of each family member. These may be different from what the student is used to at home with their natural family. American children are often given chores (housework) and curfews, which are considered a daily part of life. CIEE encourages host families to treat their exchange student as they would their own child.

### Religion

Host families may belong to an organized religion and may attend services regularly. CIEE does not encourage students to convert to a different religion, but does encourage students to try attending religious services with their host family as a cultural experience. Religious organizations serve important social functions in communities around the US, and may have youth groups that exchange students can join.

## Pre-Departure Orientation Guidelines

### Effective Communication

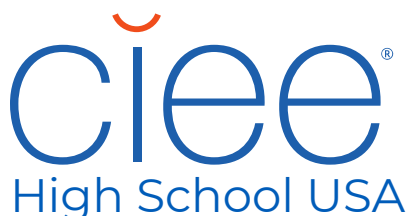
Communication is key to facilitating a positive relationship between the student and host family. While many problems can be solved through discussion and compromise, when a student is experiencing an issue, they should utilize the resources available to them on program for help. If the student cannot directly solve the issue by talking with their host family, they should contact their Local Coordinators to help with a solution. Students should also feel comfortable contacting the Support Team at any point to discuss any questions or concerns they may have. If a student's natural parents have any concerns, they should address those directly with the international representative, rather than trying to mediate the situation directly with the host family and schools. Although direct contact between host families and natural parents is typically good-intentioned, this sort of communication can lead to misunderstanding.

As you get used to life in the U.S., homesickness and culture shock are normal, and will pass if you actively work on building new relationships with your host family and friends. Although it seems that talking to your friends and family via email or cell phone will make you feel better, many students report that this makes them feel more homesick. Here are some tips for healthy communication with your family at home and in the US:

CIEE suggests that you contact your family back at home once or twice a month. More frequent contact will prevent you from truly immersing yourself into American culture, improving your English and may actually prolong your culture shock and homesickness.

When faced with problems and difficulties, we recommend the following:

1. Speak with your host family first about the problems you are experiencing, including something you might not understand, like a rule or a decision.
2. Call your Local Coordinator and ask her/him to advise you on how to resolve a problem.
3. If you are still experiencing problems, call CIEE's Support Team for help and advice at 1-800-448-9944.



## Pre-Departure Orientation Guidelines

### Student Support

Although the first point of contact for each participant is the Local Coordinator, the CIEE Student Support team is available to assist participants during their stay in the U.S. Each student is assigned to a specific Support Coordinator based on their country. The Support Team can be contacted at the CIEE office from Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm. During weekends and after business hours, CIEE maintains an emergency phone service which is available to all participants by calling 1-800-448-9944.

### Budgeting Your Money

Students should have at least \$150-250 USD available each month while participating in the CIEE High School USA Exchange Program. The student's host family is not responsible for any costs associated with purchasing clothing, gifts, souvenirs, telephone use, and some personal care products. Students should not borrow money from their host family. Students should discuss how to handle their money with both their natural parents and host parents in order to budget and manage their spending. financial needs outside of food, housing, and transportation.

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## Pre-Departure Orientation Guidelines

### Technology & Communication

The following are excerpts from the CIEE 'Technology and How You Communicate' brochure distributed to students by CIEE at their arrival.

#### Email

CIEE recommends that you come up with an email communication plan with your family and friends before leaving to the US, like responding and writing emails once per week. Time adjusting to American culture should be busy making new friends, spending time with your new host family, and doing homework.

#### Computers

It is possible that your host family will not have a computer or Internet service in their home. However, you can access these at public libraries, at school, and the home of a new friend. If your host family does not own a computer, be mindful about how you address this topic with them. Most likely, they will be receptive to learning new things from you about today's technology. You can use this as an opportunity to communicate and share with your host family.

#### Laptops

One of the drawbacks of having a laptop is that when you are homesick you will want to withdraw from your family and onto your laptop. With your laptop accessible, it is easy to spend hours alone, creating a gap between you and your new host family. Use your laptop in an area of the house where the members of your host family are spending time or studying.

#### Social Networking

Social networking can be a lot of fun, but it is important to realize that the main use of your time and focus should be on making friends and building community in the US.

#### Cell Phones

Cell phones are popular in America and most people sign up for pre-paid plans or monthly plans (which are cheaper, but you need to sign a contract for a set amount of time). Text messaging has become very popular in America in recent years. If you have a cell phone make sure to think about how you are using it:

- 1) Write text messages only in out-of-school hours.
- 2) Spend minimal amounts of time texting home.
- 3) Be mindful of phone bills and speak with your natural parents in advance about expenses.
- 4) Schools and host families will have rules about phone time, abide by these rules!