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# Living With an American Family

**A guide for  
home-stay students**



THE INTERNATIONAL  
**Language Institute**  
OF MASSACHUSETTS

## **In General**

We are sure that you will find your family sympathetic, warm and helpful. You should ask them if you do not understand something and you should tell them about your plans for the day. It's great English practice and they will be happier knowing where you are. You will be expected to follow the same rules as the other family members. We will be checking with you often about your family so that if there are any problems, we will talk about them and try to solve them.

## **Family Social Life**

Most social activities occur on weekends. On weekday evenings, families often watch television together or work by themselves doing homework, writing letters, or reading. Many people have evening meetings for school, work, church, or other organizations. You may be interested in attending meetings with your family if it is appropriate.

## **Meals**

Breakfast and lunch are light, informal meals in the U.S.A., particularly during weekdays, and family members usually choose and prepare what they will eat themselves. Dinner is the main meal of the day, and families usually eat together. The dinner hour is usually between 6:00 and 8:00, although families with young children often eat earlier.

Everyone shares in clearing the table and washing dishes. You can offer to help, and ask the family how they share the work. You may ask for more food if you are still hungry. If you are asked if you would like more, say "yes" the first time—you may not be asked a second time.

Your host family will want to know what you like and do not like to eat. Tell them if there is some food you cannot eat. You are not expected to enjoy all foods, but it is polite to try things once.

Tell your host family if there is a special food you miss. Often, the family will be able to get it for you. Offer to cook a meal from your country occasionally.

If you are not planning on joining your host family for dinner, make sure that you tell them. Do not be afraid to call them, they will appreciate it! You need to eat a balanced diet to stay healthy. If you are not getting enough to eat or you feel that the food is not healthful, you should talk to your host family.

## **Pets**

Americans often have pets ( such as cats, dogs, fish, turtles, birds, hamsters) in their homes. They often treat the animal as if it were human. If you have allergies to animals, please let us know as soon as possible.

## **Responsibilities**

Americans generally do their own housekeeping and laundry. Few people have live-in maids, although some families pay a housekeeper to help sometimes. You should clean your own room and any messes you make in other parts of the house, and do your own laundry (ask your host family for instructions). You should also do any other small jobs that are asked of you. It is also nice to offer to help with larger jobs.

## **If a Problem Occurs**

It is possible that a family and a student will have a problem or simply not get along. ILI will try to mediate between the family and student. However, ILI's first responsibility is to our international student. If a student asks to change families and does not want to dialog with the family, ILI will honor the wishes of the student.

Likewise, if a family does not want a student to continue living with them and does not wish to talk with the student to resolve the problem, ILI will move the student. Payment ends the day a student leaves the family.

## **After You Leave**

It is customary to write a "thank you" note to your host family after you leave. This note thanks your American hosts for their kindness and hospitality. They will enjoy hearing from you occasionally and it gives you another opportunity to practice your English!

## **Culture Shock**

Many students experience some culture shock when they first arrive. Culture shock is a normal reaction to living in a foreign culture. Anxiety and irritation are almost always a part of traveling or moving. Having to think about something you would automatically do under more familiar circumstances can be frustrating. Knowing new procedures for doing these things is sometimes not enough to relieve this frustration.

There are physiological and psychological symptoms when someone is experiencing culture shock. Here are some examples:

### **Physiological symptoms**

- Sleepiness or insomnia
- Compulsive eating
- Recurring minor illnesses
- Upset stomach
- Headaches

### **Psychological symptoms**

- Loneliness or boredom
- Homesickness, overly idealized feelings about home
- A sense of helplessness or over-dependence
- Irritability, hostility
- Social withdrawal
- Rebellion
- Crying

Any of these symptoms alone may not necessarily mean that you are finding your adjustment difficult. It is important to look at the total situation to see if you need help coping with culture shock. If you notice that you are experiencing culture shock, talk to your teacher.

## **What is Northampton like?**

Northampton is a small but lively town of 30,000 located in the scenic Pioneer Valley region of Western Massachusetts. It is surrounded by fourteen colleges and is just a 30-minute drive from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. There is a wide range of cultural, social, and historic opportunities to explore. The people of Northampton pride themselves on being diverse, open-minded, and often well-traveled. They are interested in meeting people from different cultures.

For sports enthusiasts, there are many opportunities available for biking, hiking, golf, downhill and cross-country skiing, ice skating, stream and river fishing, and ice fishing. For the more adventurous, there is parachuting, hang-gliding, and white water sports such as rafting, kayaking, and canoeing.

For shoppers, downtown Northampton has more than 100 shops, all within easy walking distance from ILI. There are also two shopping malls, the Holyoke Mall and the Hadley Mall, within a 20-minute drive from the town center. Many places in the Pioneer Valley are easily accessed by the local PVTA bus system ([www.pvta.com](http://www.pvta.com)).

For art lovers, the Northampton area also has many art galleries and museums, nightclubs with live music, live theater, pubs (for students under the age of 21, however, it is illegal to consume alcohol), discotheques, movie theaters, and more than 65 restaurants. ILI sometimes arranges trips to local points of interest, and there are bus connections for day or weekend trips to Boston and New York City.

## **The American Family**

Our host families have been carefully selected. They are friendly, caring people who are interested in knowing more about you and your culture. There is no “typical” family in the USA. You may live in a traditional family with two parents and children, or there may be a husband and wife, but no children. You may live with a single woman and her children. We also have some households with two women or two men living together, some of them with children. The parents may both have full-time jobs outside the home. Many families in Northampton have diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.