

# ROTARY DISTRICT 5080

## YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAM

### INBOUND STUDENT ISSUES & HOW TO ADDRESS THEM

Bringing up a teenager, especially one that is not your own child, will occasionally present some challenges. A Counselor must be appointed by the hosting Rotary Club and s/he should establish a regular monthly meeting schedule with the student, outside of the regular Rotary meeting, to discuss issues and be aware of what is going on in the student's life. This proactive approach of maintaining ongoing open communication should help to avoid many potential problems.

As surrogate parents, the Host Parents should try to resolve the day to day problems as they occur. The Rotary Counselor however, should be kept abreast of how a student is fitting in at the Host Family home. To assist the Host Parents and the Rotary Counselor in problem resolution, the below guidelines are offered.

- (a) Emotional/Homesickness Issues (*homesick, romance, holidays, etc.*)
- (b) Behavior Issues
- (c) Financial Issues
- (d) Legal Issues

**(a) Emotional/Homesickness Issues:**

Sometimes, homesickness is not immediately recognized. The sooner it is identified, the easier it is to address and resolve. Most students go through some type of homesickness, however the timing of the feelings of homesickness may vary from the first two weeks, to 4-6 weeks into the exchange, to coinciding with a major holiday back home.

Taking a proactive approach can greatly decrease the concern of homesickness. The Rotary Counselor plays a key role in helping to ensure the successful transition. The Counselor should make sure the student attends the Rotary Club meeting on a regular basis and informally meet with the student at least once a month outside of the regular Rotary meeting. Connecting the Inbound student with a Rotex student or a Rebound student can provide a great support network. If neither is available, current Inbounds can also assist in working through homesickness issues. In general, the more active the student is, the better s/he will be able to deal with homesickness. Have the student join a sport, a club, a musical or a drama production at school or in the community. Encourage the student to take the initiative to invite friends over to his/her Host Family home (with permission) for dinner or social activities.

Significant concerns about homesickness should be communicated by the Rotary Club Counselor to the District Chair and the O-E Country Contact so they can assist the local club and student in trying to resolve the situation.

**Observed Homesickness Behavior:**

Students may demonstrate homesickness in a variety of ways. Recognizing these signs is the first step to resolving the problem. These signs may include some of the following behaviors:

- (i) crying a lot or mood swings; depression
- (ii) isolation from the family, typically retreating to their own bedroom for long periods of time
- (iii) no desire to do anything, despite offers by family and friends to participate in activities
- (iv) excessive tiredness or desire to sleep a lot; not to be confused with tiredness in first few days of struggling with time changes or exhaustion from concentrating on learning a new language
- (v) excessive time on the computer, especially email or chat lines with friends back home
- (vi) rapid weight loss or gain;
- (vii) unexpected rebellion or defiance; sometimes being sent home for misbehavior is easier for a student to deal with than the embarrassment of an early return for homesickness

## Types of Homesickness & Possible Solutions:

There are a variety of reasons for homesickness and understanding the possible underlying reason is important to finding an appropriate solution. In many cases the student will learn the coping skills to adapt on his or her own; in some cases prompt action by the host family and counselor is crucial to preventing an early return; in a few rare cases, no type of intervention will prevent an early return. Some of the issues and possible solutions follow:

- (i) Issue: adapting to the food here or missing a favorite food from home  
Possible Solutions: incorporate some of the traditional foods into the diet (e.g., rice); ask for the natural mom to send a favorite recipe from home; see if there is a restaurant in the area that serves food of the particular culture and treat the student to a night out; encourage student to share his/her culture by cooking a traditional meal
- (ii) Issue: general homesickness - missing family, close relationship with a particular parent; customs;  
Possible Solutions: find out what aspects they miss and see if you can fulfill some of those needs (conversations, hugs); encourage/promote being active in family activities around the house (e.g., helping with dinner); go for walks or a coffee;
- (iii) Issue: cultural adaptation & language difficulty  
Possible Solutions: find someone who can speak the language to assist in translating concerns; this can be a risk if overused, but can be beneficial in the early stages of phasing in; have that person explain some of the cultural norms or values the student may be missing; get a Culturegram for the country; have the student join some activities at school or in the community that involve a peer group; contact with District Chair and/or Country Contact
- (iv) Issue: special holidays, celebrations  
Possible Solutions: if possible, celebrate some aspects of the event here as a cultural experience for your own family; have the student call home to send greetings on the particular holiday;
- (v) Issue: serious family illness back home  
Possible Solutions: this can be a difficult situation if there is a serious family illness back home and often there is no easy solution; frequent open conversations permitting the student to discuss his/her fears; regular communication home to know status of ill family member; in some cases a return flight home for a short duration has proven effective with the student returning following a successful operation/treatment;
- (vi) Issue: specific homesickness - missing a boyfriend or girlfriend  
Possible Solutions: this is usually the most difficult situation to resolve; much of this is up to the individual student's desire to do the exchange; restriction of the number of emails/phone calls back home to significant party; advise natural parents (if not aware of situation); advise District Chair and O-E Country Contact to advise Overseas Country Contact of concern.

## (b) Behavioral Issues:

Inappropriate behavior may include, but is not restricted to:

- (i) issues at school involving attendance, punctuality, academic effort or causing trouble at school
- (ii) personality conflict with Host Family or noncompliance with Host Family rules, such as not sharing in family duties, staying out beyond established curfew times, excessive phone and/or computer use or access to inappropriate computer sites or inappropriate downloading
- (iii) unexplained or unapproved nonparticipation in Rotary Club or District activities that have been identified as compulsory
- (iv) unauthorized travel - travel outside the district not approved by District Chairman
- (v) breaking any of the "4 D's": Drinking, Driving, Drugs, Dating
  - § Drinking – not permitted – period!
  - § Driving - includes any motorized vehicle - cars, motorcycles, tractors, jet skis, snowmobiles, etc.
  - § Drugs - no involvement with any non-prescription drugs (e.g., marijuana) - usage or peddling; no involvement with prescription drugs not prescribed to the student
  - § Dating - no serious one-to-one relationships, sexual relations, pregnancy, etc.

The Rotary Counselor should be aware of all cases of inappropriate behavior. Sometimes the host family feels they can address the behavior and do not involve the counselor. Unfortunately the behavior often continues or the pattern is repeated when the student changes to the next host family. The counselor acts as a common thread

between families and can be a neutral party in resolving the issue. Often, these problems can be solved at the Club level.

In resolving problems, the Counselor should be aware that there may be some language comprehension issues which can hinder understanding the problem and thus its resolution. To ensure consistency, clarity and fairness, the following 4 steps should be taken when trying to resolve problems with exchange students:

1. State clearly the issue and the specific behavior which is inappropriate (e.g., failing grades because not making an effort in school)
2. State what behavior is expected or appropriate. Be specific, if possible, so that it is measurable and the student knows when s/he has achieved the expectation. (e.g., spend 1 hour per day doing school work and improve grade average by 10%)
3. Provide a specific time line for changing the behavior (e.g., must show 10% improvement in 4 weeks)
4. State clearly what the consequences will be if the behavior does not change. (e.g., student will have computer privileges reduced. or Student will be sent home if no effort is made to improve grades)

For small issues (e.g., (i) to (iii) ) the counselor should handle the problem at an oral discussion stage. For more significant issues, or repeat problems, the counselor should draw up a written contract, outlining the above four steps. The student should sign and date the contract, reinforcing the seriousness of the concern. Copies should be forwarded to the District Chair, who will in turn approve the contract and forward to student's parents and sponsor chair. Although this may seem severe, it is better to make sure all the key parties are aware of the concern early on. This usually corrects the behavior. In all cases, the Club Counselor should feel free to call the District Chairman to seek assistance in handling the problem.

For more serious concerns (e.g., (iv) to (v) ) the District Chairman should be contacted.

**(c) Financial Issues:**

All students should arrive with sufficient funds to create an "Emergency Fund" of \$250.00 US. The account should require two signatures for withdrawal, the Inbound student and the Rotary Counselor. When any money is withdrawn for emergency purposes, the natural parents need to top up the account to maintain a \$250.00 US balance.

With respect to financial issues, there are usually two extremes that create problems. The Inbound student may:

- (i) have substantial (excessive) funds or come from an affluent family and sees the experience as less of an exchange and more of a holiday
- (ii) come from an impoverished country or from a family with limited resources

In the first situation, students with excessive money may feel they should have the opportunity to travel more and experience the culture that way. Sometimes this results in behavior issues and attendance issues at school.

In the second situation, a less affluent Inbound student may find the standard of living here exceeds his/her personal funds and the monthly Rotary stipend. The club may choose to assist a student from a more impoverished country. The counselor and host family should identify the ground rules with respect to telephone usage and how long distance charges should be handled (e.g., phone card vs payment after the fact). As part of the visa status, exchange students are not allowed to work (technically includes babysitting, garden work). However, a family allowance for helping out around the house would be acceptable if also done for other children in the household.

The Rotary Counselor should be aware of spending patterns for both types of students and address concerns early on. The \$350 US emergency fund should be used to offset any unexpected phone charges to the host family.

**(d) Legal Issues:**

Very rarely a student may run afoul of the law. In all cases, the District Chairman must be contacted. Issues such as shoplifting, involvement with drugs, etc. may result in criminal charges being laid. If an exchange student is charged and found guilty of a criminal offence, s/he runs the risk of being sent home, the permanent blemish of a

criminal record and also the possibility of being denied a visa in the future. In these cases, it is essential that experienced RYE staff at the District level and Ohio-Erie level be involved in trying to resolve the situation. Being charged with an offence does not mean a student will automatically be sent home, although that may be an end result.

**(a) Philosophy**

Factors which come into play in resolving legal issues are:

- (i) Maintain the integrity of the Rotary Youth Exchange program, for both current and future participants.
- (ii) Enforce the Rotary Rules and consequences, which sends a clear message to the offending student and acts as a deterrent to other exchange students
- (iii) Prevent the student being found guilty of an offence and ending up with a criminal record and the associated visa consequences

**(b) Charges Pending/Laid**

If a situation occurs where charges are pending or laid, follow the initial steps below:

- (i) Collect the **FACTS** (Date, Time, Who Involved, Sequence of Events, Charges, Possible Consequences, etc.) from the authorities.
- (ii) Have the student write out a detailed account of the situation, following the steps in (i) above, and sign the sheet. Retain this for your own records. This does not need to be shared with the legal authorities.
- (iii) Contact the District Chairman and advise him/her of the situation and the specifics. The District Chairman may in turn elect to contact the Ohio-Erie Chairman or Vice Chairman to assist in walking through the process.
- (iv) Seek the assistance of a local Rotarian lawyer (if possible) to assist you in interacting with the prosecuting authorities.

**(c) Admission of Guilt**

In those cases where the student admits guilt, or where there is substantial evidence to indicate a guilty charge would result, Ohio-Erie Rotary Youth Exchange recommends the following:

- (i) Contact the prosecution and offer to terminate the student's exchange and send him/her home, in exchange for dropping all charges.
- (ii) Secure and retain the student's passport and legal documents pending an agreement with the prosecution.

This proposal is usually acceptable to the prosecution. It accomplishes several things:

- (i) It avoids court costs and justice is still served. The consequences to the student are still punitive, in that the student may forfeit the opportunity to graduate from a high school in Canada/USA and the cost of the exchange is lost due to an early termination.
- (ii) It minimizes the Rotary Club's risk of the student possibly re-offending.
- (iii) Firm consequences by Rotary demonstrates to the community that this type of behavior is not acceptable and helps to soften any potential damage to the program image and possibly prevent a community from deciding not to continue with future Rotary exchanges.
- (iv) It sends a clear message to all Rotary Exchange Students and acts as a deterrent.