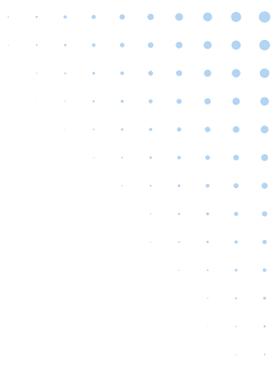




HOST FAMILY HANDBOOK

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WELCOMING

A STUDENT INTO YOUR HOME— AN EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME

Becoming a host family to a student from a different country and culture is both an enriching and challenging experience. Welcoming international students into our homes helps develop friendships that will last a lifetime and by sharing your home and offering guidance to your student your family becomes an important part of their life.

THE NOVA SCOTIA INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PROGRAM

Initiated in 1997, the Nova Scotia International Student Program (NSISP) is a joint venture of the seven English speaking Regional Centres for Education (RCE) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The NSISP provides students from over 30 countries with education programs and the opportunity to learn our language and culture. The NSISP is committed to creating global citizens by promoting the growth of intercultural understanding and increased international education opportunities for Nova Scotian students and students from around the world.

Marketed in various countries, the NSISP uses international education fairs and contracted education agents to recruit potential students to the program. The agents act as representatives of the NSISP not only in recruiting the students but helping them with their applications and travel arrangements. They also act as the liaison between the NSISP and the student's parents while the students are in Canada.

A student's acceptance to the program is based on school performance, adaptability, English language ability, and good health. All students studying for more than six months must obtain a study permit to come into the country to study. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, a department within the Canadian Government, is responsible for issuing study permits. The NSISP has developed relationships with Immigration Consultants within Nova Scotia. These consultants can be hired by the students if they need help renewing their study permit or obtaining a study permit if the student chooses to extend their program.

After students apply to study in Nova Scotia, the NSISP reviews applications and, if accepted, assigns them to one of the Regional Centre for Education. The Regional Centre for Education places the student in one of their participating schools. The availability of a suitable homestay placement in the region often determines the choice of school.

THE STUDENTS' COUNTRIES

The NSISP works closely with agents around the world to bring students to the province. Students come from all over the world including, but not limited to, Belgium, Brazil, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Spain, the Netherlands, Thailand, and Turkey.

BECOMING A HOST FAMILY

Families interested in becoming a host family should contact their local RCE and speak with the International Student Program representative. After speaking to the NSISP representative, the family receives information for their perusal. The NSISP representative follows-up with the family and organizes a home visit to ensure they meet the requirements to host. At this time the host family will complete required documentation, including: a host family profile, as well as paperwork for a Criminal Record Check (CRC) including the Vulnerable Sector Check and Child Abuse Registry (CAR). The CRC and CAR are mandatory and needed for every resident or regular visitor of the home, over the age of 18. These checks will be updated as required by the RCE or if a new resident enters the home.

Initial Home visits are an opportunity for families to ask questions and gather more information on the program and for the NSISP representative to assess their suitability. Homestay coordinators are also required to visit the home at least once per semester.

Upon approval, the NSISP representative matches a student with a host family. Matches are based on family and student interests, and family and student preferences.

The NSISP is responsible to ensure students are housed in an environment where all parties feel safe. Host families must inform program staff if they feel their safety is in jeopardy, they become victims of domestic abuse, and/or they request a peace bond, restraining order, etc.

HOST FAMILIES AGREE TO

- Provide a friendly, welcoming family environment which is sensitive to the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student
- Provide a Vulnerable Record Check and Child Abuse Registry check for every household member over the age of 18 prior to hosting and update all documentation as required by the Centre for Education.
- Provide furnished accommodation in a single room in which the furniture consists of a bed, dresser, closet/wardrobe, and egress window. The family will also provide internet, food for three healthy meals a day, and warm, comforting heat in the winter months
- Facilitate a discussion of household rules with the student upon his/her arrival and review reasons for Canadian/local/family customs and norms
- Allow the Homestay Coordinator or designate access to the student's room when necessary
- Welcome and include the student as a member of the family, help the student pursue extracurricular interests, including assisting with a reasonable amount of transportation
- Notify the Centre for Education immediately as household information changes (i.e. a new person moves into the home, new phone number, new pet, etc.)
- Maintain adequate home and content insurance to cover an international student living in the home.
- Complete a yearly mandatory host family orientation program provided by the Centre for Education.
- Contact the Homestay Coordinator should significant problems with students occur
- Keep all information about students confidential as required under the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act. Personal information about students will be shared only with the NSISP.

- Understand even though a host family has been approved there is no guarantee the host family will be assigned a student
- Acknowledge students may not use drugs or alcohol and contact the Homestay Coordinator immediately should this issue arise. Further acknowledge drugs or alcohol may not be provided to a student in any situation, including holidays or celebrations
- Allow their student to attend parties and understand each party is decided upon by host parents. The host parents live in the community and can confirm it is a safe party. Host families with questions about parties and safety at these events are encouraged to contact their homestay coordinators.
- Contact their homestay coordinator should they have to be away overnight as students are not to be left home alone overnight unsupervised. The homestay coordinator can confirm who would be approved as an appropriate chaperone
- Understand where an incompatibility exists between the student and the host family, the Homestay Coordinator will determine if a satisfactory solution can be found. If necessary, it is understood a student may be moved
- Inform program staff if they feel their safety is in jeopardy, they (or any household member) become victims of domestic abuse, subject of a criminal investigation, and/or they request a peace bond, restraining order, etc.
- A student can be removed if any member of the household is the subject of a criminal investigation.

*****Homeowners are required to have homeowner liability insurance and any accidents in the home involving international students are to be covered by the home owners insurance plan.*****

HOST FAMILIES ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR

Student finances

Students are responsible for setting up their own bank accounts. Host families can help with this process. Host families are not responsible for providing an allowance, monitoring spending, or lending money. If hosts feel their student is not receiving enough money from home or is spending beyond their means, they should contact the local program representative.

Personal items

Students are responsible for purchasing their own toiletry items, school supplies, club memberships, social events etc. However, if the family takes their student to dinner or a social event, then the family is responsible for the cost.

Monitoring food

Families are not responsible for putting the student on any kind of diet including one for personal or religious beliefs. Families are; however, responsible for providing healthy meals and snacks. Host families do need to be aware of any dietary concerns (gluten free, vegetarian, etc.) as listed on the application.



PREPARING FOR THE ARRIVAL OF YOUR STUDENT

A successful homestay happens when all members of the family agree that taking an international student into the home is a good idea. If any family member disagrees then it could cause problems throughout the school year and the family may wish to reconsider hosting.

Once a student is placed, families can begin preparing the bedroom for the student. Necessities for your student include a bed, a desk, and somewhere to store clothes and other personal items. Optional items:

- clock radio
- bulletin board (if families do not want items attached to the walls)
- calendar
- reading light
- extra blankets (many students come from warmer climates)
- any other small touches

Students should also have:

- set of house keys
- list of important phone numbers (host family contacts, police, emergency contacts, etc.)

Once a student is placed with your family they will be provided with a letter introducing their school, community, your family, and your contact details (email and phone number). **The NSISP advises students, through their respective agencies, to contact the host family first. Although it may be tempting to contact your student – please wait until they have initiated contact.** This ensures they have received your information. Please check your spam/junk folder in your email to be sure their email hasn't gone there as often they use email programs specific to their country which could be considered spam by your host.

Once email correspondence has begun it is a great way to learn more about your student, their personality, their likes and dislikes, and their expectations. In return the student's natural family learns more about the family their child will be living with while attending school. This is very important for some natural families as they prepare to send their child to a new country to live. Corresponding will also help make your first meeting less awkward.



The NSISP recommends families familiarize themselves with their student's home country. This helps give insight into the culture and helps with the communication gap because host families can ask questions about their student's homeland. Families can ask their homestay coordinators for copies of the *Culturegrams* from the students' country.

The NSISP runs an Ambassador program through its local high schools. These Ambassadors are chosen by the schools and RCE representatives. They receive training at a two-day camp in August on how to welcome and help international students. The Ambassadors help them with a wide-range of activities from the first few days of schools, to learning about social events and registering for teams/clubs. They will also introduce the student to the school's international liaison. It is also useful if the host family knows local Canadian students in the area who are close in age to the international student to let them know they will be hosting. The more Canadian friends the international student has the easier the first few weeks will be as the international students will feel much less alone.

STUDENT ARRIVAL

Once correspondence begins with the student, host families could hear from them as to their flight arrival information. If you receive this information please inform the Homestay Coordinator so the information can be checked with the agent. **Consider this information tentative! The Homestay Coordinator/Program Manager will confirm flights.** During peak travel times arrangements often change and agents are trying to get the most economical flights for the students so things can change at the last minute.

At least one member of the host family should be at the airport to greet the student upon arrival. A representative from the NSISP will also be there to ensure safe arrival and departure with the host family. Please refer to the *Host Families Arrival and Departure Procedures* for more information.

The NSISP encourages families to make their own colourful signs to welcome their students. Families may also welcome their student with balloons, flowers, or small gifts.

International flights, combined with changes in time zones, weather, food and the downside of the initial adrenaline surge, can leave a student exhausted, sometimes to the point of being overtired where the student wants to do everything. Once a student arrives at their homestay, excitement is high. During the first hours students may not be the least bit tired and usually want to take in as much as they possibly can. However, some students will be tired or jet-lagged after the long journey. Some will be very hungry and others will not be hungry or may not want to eat for a day or two. Remember, the combination of being excited and being on a different time clock can produce some different behaviours. Some students adjust quickly to their new home, while others take much longer.

After arriving home from the airport, show the student their bedroom and around the house. Ensure their documents (passport, return airline ticket, etc) are put in a secure location. Tell them where things are and how they work. However, with all the excitement in those first few hours, students may not remember everything their host family has told them.

Think about the student waking up the next morning in a strange house and anticipate what they might be wondering. Remember, the more help students get with practical matters the more at ease they will feel. Don't be afraid to explain simple things. In a new culture even small things are new. Also, remember families have an established way of interacting and a way of daily operation. Adding a new person to this mixture is a jolt to all family members. Be clear and direct with the student and approach matters and questions with an open mind. Hesitation and confusion often occur for both family and student during the first few weeks of the program. Working out what place the student will take in the host family often leads to some awkward moments. This is normal. However, once things get worked through everyone can concentrate on building interesting and enriching relationships. **Remember: be patient with your student.**



CULTURE SHOCK AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Culture shock happens to all international students in varying degrees. At orientation NSISP representatives discuss culture shock and methods of dealing with the problem. Four phases to be aware of:

1. The Honeymoon

Students are excited about their new experiences and surroundings. Students will begin to associate Canada with their home country. They will also look for similarities between the two, and this helps them feel more comfortable.

2. Shock

Students start to feel a little disorientated. They will start to notice the differences between Canadian living and home. At this point the student might feel the most homesick. Most students do not display strong symptoms however some may get sleepier or need more time alone away from the host family. Keep the lines of communication open during this time as the student may want to talk about their feelings.

3. Recovery

Students feel more comfortable, relaxed and secure within their surroundings.

4. Home free

Students are now members of the family. Students will begin to enjoy the differences of their new life. They will also display more confidence and feel at home with their host family.

Students will go through these stages at different paces and some may not experience any culture shock. Culture shock is temporary for most students. With a little understanding and guidance from the host family, students can recover quickly.



THOSE FIRST FEW WEEKS

The first few days and weeks of the program can be a difficult time for international students and their host families. The NSISP suggests students and host families spend that time getting to know each other better. Issues families may want to address are:

1. Food

Typically when students first arrive they may not eat a lot. Imagine uprooting your life, living with a family from a different culture, and having to eat different foods. It may take a week or two before students begin eating any amount of food. A good idea is to take them on a trip to the grocery store where they can point out some of their favourite foods. Some students have a hard time adjusting to the food in Canada as it can be different than food in their home country (less spicy, more starchy, etc.)

2. Supervision

Prior to undertaking this international program it is imperative that students and their parents understand the students will be subject to the rules and procedures of their host family. In accordance with the above, student's liberties may vary from which they are ordinarily accustomed in their own home. This is part of the experience. All reasonable rules must be followed. If there is a discrepancy students are encouraged to contact their Homestay Coordinator with questions or concerns about any host family policy. Further, all students have a right to essential privacy in their homestay; however the host family, at their discretion, reserves the right to search any room or item found within their home. Students are not permitted to be left home alone overnight unsupervised.

3. Language

Students might find it difficult to talk with and understand their new family and friends. The NSISP suggests families and friends speak slowly and try avoiding slang. Help your student with their pronunciation and with speaking in sentences. Before long, the student will sound just like any member of the family. One fun recommendation is to label items in your home (refrigerator, chair, desk, etc.) to help your student identify the word if they are struggling.

4. Manners

What we perceive as good manners can be completely different in another country. Silence and lack of curiosity in some areas of the world is considered rude. However, in some cultures it is a sign of respect. In some cultures, people do not say please and thank-you as readily as we do in Canada. On the other hand, in some cultures it would be considered unbelievably polite according to our standards. A student's level of modesty can be quite different from your own. Please refer to the Culturegram for the respective country to learn more about manners.

5. Transportation

Most of our students come from large cities where public transportation is readily available and they find it difficult to rely on their host family to drive them to their activities. They might complain about their location as a result. Explain in many places across the country this is the reality and the student will eventually adjust. It is advisable to work with other families to carpool. The NSISP does not recommend charging students for drives; treat your international student the same you would your own child. Please note: The NSISP prohibits students from driving while part of the program. Students are able to take a driver's education program and obtain their license if they have permission from their natural parents. They may only drive the driver's education car and cannot drive at all once they receive a license.

6. School and Friends

All international students must attend school. They must also put an effort into their studies. Some students claim that because they are not here for school credit they do not need to do homework or assignments. It is a good idea to remind them of program rules and expectations. Encouraging the student to enroll in extra-curricular activities is a great way for them to meet new students. This is part of the agreement the student signed when enrolling in the NSISP. It also helps make their stay here in Canada richer and more memorable. Should you have any concerns about courses please discuss with the HSC right away, students cannot change courses without permission of NSISP office.

7. Cultural Sensitivity

Students come from many different countries and walks of life. Customs about cleanliness, including showers and laundry, to personal space, including shaking hands, hugging, and table manners may vary greatly from ours. Families are encouraged to discuss these and other cultural differences with their students as early as possible. Reviewing the Culturegram will also help build an understanding of cultural awareness.



FAMILY VISITS FROM HOME

Visits from natural family are encouraged, although some students will find these visits disruptive. Students get into a routine and become part of a Canadian family and sometimes find it stressful to balance this with the presence of family members from home. However, this is a very positive experience and a wonderful opportunity for the host parents to meet their students' parents. Family visits from home are not advisable during exam time or during the first six weeks of the program.

NSISP does not recommend families stay with their child's host families. They should make arrangements for their own accommodations. Host families are not responsible for accommodations, transportation, or meals for their student's families visiting Nova Scotia. Extending Nova Scotia hospitality is encouraged and hosting the family for a meal in the home is always welcome.





STUDENT TRAVEL

Students are encouraged to travel and visit other places in Canada. If the student plans to travel out of the province, without their host parents, the student's parents must give written permission. Student Travel is defined as travel that is not part of a school, RCE, or Nova Scotia International Student Program organized trip or event.

Please note: Student Travel is defined as travel that is not part of a school, RCE, or Nova Scotia International Student Program organized trip or event. **The RCE Director has the final decision on whether the student can travel.**

The NSISP travel policy states:

Within the Maritimes
(Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island)

- **Independently:** students must receive acknowledgement from their host family, homestay coordinator and/or program manager/director and consent of their custodian.
- **With host family:** students must receive acknowledgment from their homestay coordinator and/or program manager/director and consent of their custodian.

Outside the Maritimes
(Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island)

- **Independently:** students must obtain acknowledgement from their host family, homestay coordinator and/or program manager/director and written permission, in English, from their natural parents. They must be accompanied by a responsible adult (minimum age of 25). They must request approval from their agent and host family two weeks prior to travelling and submit the NSISP travel form.
- **With host family:** students must obtain acknowledgement from their program manager and/or director and written permission, in English, from their natural parents. Students must submit the NSISP travel form.
- Students are responsible for all costs incurred by the travel. **Students must fill out the NSISP travel form and submit it to the program manager and/or director for approval prior to booking flights or finalizing details.**

Please note: the renting of hotel rooms by an unaccompanied minor is illegal in Canada and this practice cannot be supported by the NSISP. As well, students cannot act as chaperones for other students.

The NSISP asks host families to inform them before taking their student on a trip lasting more than a day. In case of an emergency, the NSISP needs to know where to reach the student or family. Host families are required to fill out a “J” Form to travel with their student.

MEDICAL INSURANCE

Students receive medical coverage through Medavie Blue Cross. Students pay for their medical coverage through their program fees. They will receive a card showing they have coverage through Medavie Blue Cross. It's a good idea to take photo of this card in case it gets lost.

If they have any procedure done at the hospital, Medavie Blue Cross, in some cases, receives a direct bill from the hospital; however sometimes a student will be required to pay for a service upfront and will be reimbursed after Medavie Blue Cross receives their receipt and claim form. The student requires a bank account for reimbursement.

Medavie Blue Cross does not cover regular trips to the dentist. However, the insurance will cover the cost of the dentist if the visit is the result of an accident.

If a student is injured/requires medical attention the Student Accident Report Form must be completed and submitted to your RCE representative. For more information on Medavie Blue Cross insurance for international students please visit their website:

www.nsisinsurance.ca

- **Illnesses like a cough, flu, sore throat do not typically require a visit to the doctor.**
- **Your host family will help you decide if you need to see a doctor.**
- **The next step is deciding on walk-in clinic vs hospital.**
- **Walk-in clinics have shorter wait time and are better for non-emergencies. Please trust your host family as they will treat you the same they do their own children or themselves.**

FINANCIAL REIMBURSEMENT FOR HOST FAMILIES

Host families receive monthly financial reimbursement from their respective RCE. Families do not receive payment from the student or the student's family directly. If there is a problem with payment please contact your local Homestay Coordinator.

USE OF TELEPHONE, INTERNET AND/OR COMPUTER

When students arrive families should clarify the use of the telephone, internet and computer and make sure the student understands the host family rules.

Most students bring their own technology and others use family computers. It is important host families understand they have the right and responsibility to monitor and restrict all technology use, if necessary. Families who enforce time limits for their own children can also enforce time limits for their international students. If this becomes a problem please speak to the local Homestay Coordinator



DEPARTURE

The end of the semester can be a very emotional time for students and their hosts. The end of a semester/year seems to sneak up quickly on a student and the host family. A few things to help your student prepare for departure:

- help them close bank accounts, if needed.
- have them to do a packing test with their suitcase. Airlines are very strict with weight limits and it's better to work on the luggage before arriving to the airport and having to repack because the bag was too heavy.
- Ensure they know where their passport and airplane ticket are and keep them safe.
- Please refer to the Host Families Arrival and Departure Procedures for more information.

Although it is tempting to allow your student to stay an extra week or two after school ends the students cease to be considered participants in the NSISP after June 30. Their medical insurance has expired at this time as well.

The NSISP does not run the homestay program in July or August. Although students will ask to stay with their host family during the summer they are not permitted to stay. Hosting a student in the summer requires a family to be legally and financially responsible for the student. There is no support from the NSISP during the summer months. As well, the NSISP believes host families need a break from hosting NSISP students to recharge for September. If host families choose to continue to host through the summer months, going against NSISP rules, they may not be asked to host again in future years.

If a student cannot return to their home country they can enroll in the ESL Summer Camp, offered in Truro, or another program of their choosing.



RETURNING TO THE NSISP

All study permits and student visas have an expiry date. If your student wants to extend their visa or study permit the local Homestay Coordinator can provide the student with contact information for approved immigration consultants. The NSISP and host family are not permitted by law to help the student with this task. Students may need a full physical examination for the approval of their extension. The examination may cost approximately \$200 Cdn.

SUPPORT FOR THE HOST FAMILY

The NSISP gives support to all the host families involved with the program. Host families can talk to their Homestay Coordinator or RCE representative when problems arise. They also have a network of other host families for support. The NSISP recognizes that without the support of these families the NSISP would not continue to grow and become successful.

GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL HOMESTAY EXPERIENCE

- Welcome the student into the home with care and understanding. Remember the student may be homesick upon arrival and you should show compassion and sensitivity to the student.
- Understand and agree to accept this student as one of the family. It may be uncomfortable at first but include them in normal family activities.
- Talk to your student regularly. Show interest in their school projects, activities, or hobbies.
- The NSISP has developed a student passport for the NSISP has developed a student passport app that students can download on their phones. The students can use this app to take photos, enter monthly contests and learn about activities available in their communities. Host families can also download the app to stay engaged.
- Spend recreational time with your student. On occasion the NSISP will take them to places of local interest or to sightseeing attractions. Encourage students to make friends at school and in the neighbourhood. School and community activities are an important part of your student's experience in Nova Scotia. Provide a reasonable amount of transportation for your student to attend school activities or other community activities.
- Maintain regular communication with the Homestay Coordinator.
- Successful families also give their students time, attention, and love. These attributes make the program a memorable experience for everyone involved.

FINAL MESSAGE

Every year the NSISP continues to grow in the number of students and its successes. This is mainly due to the wonderful hospitality students receive from their host families. We would like to thank you for continuing to support our program and for being an invaluable contributor to success of the NSISP. We hope you continue to be part of our program.



Nova Scotia
International
Student
Program

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. I cannot pronounce my host student's name. What do I do?

Answer: Work with your student to say their name properly. Ask them to correct you until you are saying it properly. When your student arrives and when you have adopted a Canadian name – don't be alarmed. This is common.

2. My student is going to an activity that requires waivers to be signed. Am I able to sign those?

Answer: No. If a waiver is needed for a student to participate in an activity then host families are not permitted to sign it. All waivers must be signed by natural parents. However, permission forms from the school, for a day trip, may be signed by the host family.

3. We have a pet but my student doesn't want it around. Did they know I had a pet?

Answer: Yes, the student would have been told in their welcome letter there was a pet in a home. Pets are viewed differently depending on the culture. Do not force the student to try and enjoy your pet as much as you do. Respect their discomfort and work with them slowly to introduce the pet.

4. Do I take my student to the hospital or will the Homestay Coordinator do this for me?

Answer: Depending on the situation, the host family typically will take their student to the hospital. If the situation requires higher level care the custodian of the student will arrive.

5. Should I write my rules down?

Answer: In the beginning it is useful to have the student be able to read the rules. Your rules should be the same for your international student and any natural children in the home.

6. Things aren't going right, can I stop hosting?

Answer: Sometimes things don't work out between the student and host family. If there are problems please talk to the HSC. If, after trying to solve the problem, the match isn't working the student can be moved. This is certainly not failure and usually you can try and host again.

7. Do I have to drive my student everywhere?

Answer: No; however, there is an expectation students will be given drives as public transportation is quite limited in Nova Scotia.

8. The bathroom habits of my student are very strange.

How do I address this?

Answer: Different countries have different ways when using the bathroom. It is best to make it very clear to the student how things work in your home from the beginning (toilet paper is flushed, showers once a day, etc).

9. We go to church every Sunday.

Does my student have to come with me?

Answer: No. It is entirely up to the student if they wish to attend church services. Please respect their religion.

10. My student had a few beer at a party the other night.

I'm okay with that. Do I have to tell anyone?

Answer: Yes, drinking is against the rules of the NSISP. The student may not be sent home for the first infraction; however, they will go on a behavior agreement.

11. I'm having issues with my student. Can I contact the natural family and agent directly?

Answer: No, any concerns or issues must go through your Homestay Coordinator. Your Homestay Coordinator will ensure proper procedures are followed to address your concerns.