Homestay Handbook

For Host Families

HAMILTON HOMESTAY SERVICES

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Produced by Hamilton Homestay Services T/A AXPM Ltd

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HAMILTON HOMESTAY SERVICES

Introduction

Kia ora and welcome!

Thank you for opening your home to an international student. Hosting an international student is more than simply offering a bed and meals — it is about creating a welcoming, safe, and family-like environment. Students are far from their homes, families, and everything familiar to them. By offering kindness, guidance, and patience, you are giving them an opportunity to adjust to life in New Zealand, learn English, and build independence.

This handbook is your friendly, practical guide to creating a safe, caring, and enjoyable homestay. It outlines what's expected of you as a host, while also offering tips and guidance to make the experience positive for both your family and your student. Please read it carefully and refer back whenever you need a reminder.

Code of Practice

Hamilton Homestay Services (HHS) adheres to the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021, which sets clear expectations for the well-being and safety of international students. We require host families to read and follow the parts relevant to residential caregivers. You can find the full Code at https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/tertiary/the-code/

Key Contact

We're here to help. If you have questions or concerns, please get in touch:

Chloe Tso (your main contact)
Phone: 020 497 2591
Email: hamiltonhomestayservices@gmail.com
Facebook: hamiltonhomestayservices

After each placement is confirmed, you will also be given the contact details for relevant school staff who support international students.

Call 111 in the event of an emergency such as a fire, urgent medical, or police matters.

HAMILTON HOMESTAY SERVICES

When to Contact HHS

The safety and well-being of international students is our top priority. As a host, please let us know immediately if you notice anything that could affect your student's safety, health, happiness, or living situation. Even if you're unsure whether something is serious enough to report, please contact us anyway. We would always rather hear too much than too little.

Health & Safety

Please contact HHS straight away if:

- The student has an accident, injury, or serious illness (beyond everyday colds or minor issues).
- The student shows signs of emotional distress, ongoing homesickness, or possible depression or anxiety.
- The student is involved in an unsafe or emergency situation (e.g. missing, lost, or home late beyond curfew).
- The student is using or exposed to alcohol, vaping, drugs, or other illegal activity.
- There is any contact with police or emergency services, even if the matter seems minor.
- The student is absent from school without permission.

Student Behaviour

Please report if you notice:

- Sudden changes in the student's mood, sleep, or appetite.
- Persistent refusal to attend school or frequent late.
- Conflicts, bullying, or inappropriate relationships at school or outside.
- Repeated disrespect for house rules or risky behaviour.
- The student isolating themselves excessively or refusing to join family activities.
- You notice anything that could pose a risk to the student's well-being or safety.

Homestay Changes

Please inform HHS if:

- Anyone new moves into the home, or a family member moves out.
- You are planning to go away overnight, and someone else will supervise the student (we must approve the temporary caregiver).
- Your contact details (address, phone, or email) change.
- There are major home renovations or room changes that could affect the student.

Travel or Overnight Plans

Let HHS know and seek approval first if:

- You plan to take the student on a trip that involves spending the night away from home (such as camping, road trips, or holidays).
- The student plans to stay overnight away from home, even with friends or relatives.
- The student plans to travel outside the local area, or join a trip not organised by school or HHS.
- If you are contacted directly by the student's parents, agent, or school regarding travel, please forward details to us.

How to Report

Urgent matters: Call or text Chloe immediately.
Non-urgent concerns: Email or message HHS with details of what happened.
If unsure: Contact us regardless, we'll help you decide what to do next.

Requirements of A Host

Safety Checks

When registering to become a host family with HHS, hosts must complete a set of checks which include confirmation of identity, reference checks, police vetting, and a risk assessment interview.

All household members over 18 years old must complete a police vet check. Safety checks are completed upon registration and every three years thereafter to keep information up to date.

What Hosts Provide

Hosts need to provide each student with:

- A private, comfortable and furnished bedroom with adequate lighting and heating.
- Clean bedding and towels, refreshed every one to two weeks.
- Nutritious meals every day.
- Cupboard and refrigerator space for personal food and items.
- Access to laundry facilities and detergent.
- Transport to and from school if required.
- Unlimited Wi-Fi (or clear communication if there is a data limit).
- A working smoke alarm within three meters of the student's bedroom door.
- A safe, friendly and supportive family environment with clear and simple house rules.

Ongoing Responsibilities

- Provide appropriate supervision and keep a general awareness of the student's whereabouts and activities.
- Ensure the student attends school on time, and inform the school if they are late or absent due to sickness.
- Encourage the student to speak English and invite them to join family activities when possible.
- Promote a healthy lifestyle — regular sleep, balanced meals, physical activity, and balanced screen time.
- Support the student to adjust to household routines and New Zealand customs with patience and kindness.
- Assist the student to visit the doctor if unwell, take care of the sick student at home if they cannot go to school.
- Be aware of the student's physical and mental health, report concerns promptly to HHS and the school.

Orientation

The first day sets the tone. A calm, thorough orientation helps the student settle quickly and feel confident. Please take time to guide them through the essentials — things that may seem obvious to you could be completely new to them.

When your student arrives:

- Give the student a tour of your home. Show them their bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, living areas, laundry, and outdoor spaces. Explain which areas are for family use, which are private, and where they can keep their own things.
- Explain house rules. Give them a written copy of the rules to keep in their room.
- Introduce the student to your family routines, such as when you normally relax together or enjoy a shared activity.
- Show them how to use appliances such as heater, washing machine, and microwave.
- Talk about how to open/close windows safely, how to air out the room, and explain energy-saving habits common in New Zealand.
- Show where to put rubbish and recycling, and explain local recycling practices.
- Point out the smoke alarms and explain what it does and what to do if one sounds.
- Show them where the first-aid kit is kept, explain how to dial 111 in an emergency, and point out the family's meeting spot outside in case of a fire.
- Provide a house key for older students (at your discretion) and explain any alarm code.
- Share the Wi-Fi password and encourage the student to message family to confirm arrival.

- Make sure you both have each other's mobile numbers and that the student knows the home address.
- Let the student know how you'd like them to keep you updated. For example, by texting if they'll be late home.
- Explain and practice the route to school, shops, parks, and other key places; provide a simple map.
- If the student goes to school by bus, help them obtain a bus card and download a real-time bus app on their phone.
- Introduce friendly neighbours if appropriate, it helps the student feel connected.

A welcome letter is a nice gesture and an easy way of introducing the student to your family. You may include in the letter a warm welcoming message, a brief introduction to yourself and your family, and any information that you think the student might need.

House Rules

Every household runs a little differently, so it's important to make your expectations clear from the very beginning. Students may not be familiar with how things are usually done in New Zealand homes, so going through your rules kindly and patiently will help them adjust. It's also useful to give them a written copy to keep in their room, so they can refer back to it if needed.

Below are some common points you may wish to cover:

- Let your student know what time meals are usually served, and what to do if they'll be late or eating elsewhere.
- Explain whether they can help themselves to snacks and drinks, and where they can store personal food in the pantry or fridge.
- Clarify whether students may cook for themselves and, if so, what food and equipment they can use. Remind them to always clean up after cooking, wash dishes, and return things to their place.
- Explain when it's best to shower, how long is reasonable (about 10 minutes), and how to leave the bathroom tidy afterwards. Make sure they know sanitary products should go in the bin, not the toilet.
- Tell your student whether you do the washing or if they should do their own. Show them where to put dirty clothes, what days laundry is done, and how to use the washing machine. Remind them not to dry damp clothes in bedrooms or bathrooms.
- Ask your student to keep their room reasonably tidy and to check with you before moving furniture or putting things on the walls. Let them know how often bedding will be changed and who will do it.
- For younger students, agree on a curfew and explain what happens if they are late. For older students, it may be more about "checking in" so you always know

where they are and when they'll be home. Remind them to text or call if plans change.

- Be clear about whether students can invite friends over, and if so, when and under what conditions. Overnight guests are not permitted.
- Show your student how to lock doors and windows, use the alarm system if you have one.
- Let them know any limits or expectations for Wi-Fi use. If screen time becomes excessive, encourage breaks and balance.
- Explain that smoking, vaping, and alcohol are not permitted for students under 18. For older students, outline your family's rules and expectations. Illegal drugs are never permitted.

Student's Bedroom

The student's bedroom should be equipped with the following:

- A bed
- Adequate bedding (pillow, sheets, blanket or duvet)
- Clean towels
- A desk, a chair and a desk lamp for students staying for long term
- A wardrobe or drawers for clothing and personal belongings
- Adequate heating in cold weather, such as a heater or an electric blanket in the bedroom (explain the controls and safety precautions to them)
- Good natural light and ventilation
- Free from pests, mildew and other hazards

The student's room must be inside the main house, not a sleep-out or other separate dwelling, so they feel included in family life.

Please change bed linen every one to two weeks and let the student know how you manage sheet and towel washing. You may need to teach younger students how to make the bed and change the bed linens as this might be a new experience for them.

For short-term students (for example, those staying less than four weeks), it is acceptable for two students of the same gender to share a bedroom with separate beds, as long as the room is spacious enough and both students are comfortable with the arrangement. However, for long-term placements, each student must be provided with their own private bedroom.

Student's Privacy

Students have the right to reasonable privacy in their rooms. Hosts should allow them to close their bedroom door when resting, studying, or having personal time. It is not appropriate to require the door to stay open at all times. Always knock and wait for a response before entering the student's bedroom. Do not look through

their drawers, luggage, or personal belongings. Never move or remove their personal items without permission.

Be mindful about how you handle your student's personal information as well. Never share their personal information (such as photos, family matters, behaviour, or academic performance) on social media or with anyone outside HHS and the school without consent.

Meals

Meals are an important part of homestay life, not just for nutrition but also for family connection. Sharing food together helps students practise English, feel included, and experience Kiwi family life.

What Hosts Provide

By default, all placements include three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The only exception is if a student makes a special request at the beginning of their homestay booking. Snacks should also be available, especially for younger students.

- Breakfast is usually self-served. Please show your student what is available and how to prepare it.
- Lunch can often be packed or can be prepared by the student, but younger students will need help.
- Dinner should be prepared by the host and, whenever possible, eaten together at the table. This is one of the best times for conversation and cultural exchange.

If you are unable to prepare a meal on a particular day, please make alternative arrangements in advance, such as providing ingredients for the older student to cook, offering takeaways, or preparing the meal in advance and teach the student to re-heat the food. If you take your student out for dinner, it should be treated as a family meal (host pays). If they eat out with friends, they cover their own costs.

If the student has food allergies or special dietary needs, we will let you know in advance before the placement starts.

Helping Students Adjust to Food

Many students, especially younger ones, may find it difficult to adjust to Western food. This is normal and can be challenging for them at first. A few ways to help include:

- Taking your student shopping with you so they can point out familiar foods. Visiting a Asian supermarket is a good idea for students from Asia.

- Encouraging them to cook or share a favourite dish from their culture.
- Serving familiar staples alongside your own family meals (for example, rice or noodles with dinner).
- Being patient and offering small tastes of new foods until they feel more comfortable.

In many cultures, including Chinese, hot food is expected even at breakfast and lunch. Students may be surprised to see that in New Zealand, breakfast is often cereal and toast, and lunch may be sandwiches. To help with this adjustment:

- Offer simple ways of warming food, such as heating milk for cereal or porridge at breakfast.
- If possible, pack lunches in a thermos jar so students can enjoy warm food at school.
- Explain to your student that it isn't always practical to have hot food during the day, as microwaves are not usually available at school. Encourage them to enjoy warm meals at breakfast and especially at dinner time with the family.

Food Portions

Many teenage students from overseas have a bigger appetite than local children of the same age. At the same time, they are often too shy or too polite to ask for more food, even if they are still hungry. Please make it a habit to check with your student during meals to ensure they have eaten enough. It's also thoughtful to offer snacks between meals so they feel well-fed throughout the day.

Many families in New Zealand serve meals "family style" (food in serving dishes for everyone to help themselves). This may be unfamiliar to some students, who are used to being served a plate directly. It's helpful to explain this, and gently encourage them to take seconds if they'd like more.

Food Suggestions

- Breakfast: cereal with warm milk, toast and spreads, fruit, eggs, porridge, smoothies.
- Lunch: sandwiches, wraps, fried rice or noodles in a thermos, soup with bread, leftovers from previous night's dinner.
- Snacks: fruit, yoghurt, nuts, muesli bars, crackers, cheese toasties, muffin.
- Dinner: pasta, stir-fries, curries, rice dishes, roasts, barbecues, soups with vegetables.

Bathroom & Toilet

Bathrooms and toilets can cause confusion for international students, as habits and facilities vary greatly across cultures. A little clear guidance at the beginning will prevent awkwardness later.

Bathroom Use

- Show your student how everything works — from taps and showers to light switches and extractor fans.
- Agree on suitable shower times and explain that showers should usually be kept to about 10 minutes.
- Let them know when it's best to shower (for example, not late at night if the sound travels through the house).
- Explain that the bathroom should be left clean and tidy for the next person. Show them how to wipe surfaces, use the fan or open a window after showering.

Toilet Use

- Explain to your student kindly that only toilet paper is flushed down the toilet. Sanitary items should always go in the bin provided.
- In some countries, all paper is placed in a basket. Explain that in New Zealand, toilet paper goes into the toilet.
- Show them where spare toilet rolls are kept, and where they can keep their own toiletries.

In some countries, people often wash clothes in the bathroom and then hang them in the bathroom or even in their bedroom. Remind the student that we don't do that in New Zealand. Show them where to hang wet items properly.

Hosts should provide toilet paper and clean towels (face towel and bath towel) to the student, while the student should bring their own personal toiletries such as body wash, shampoo, toothbrush and toothpaste, feminine sanitary products.

Pay attention to your student's personal hygiene. Make sure they shower and brush their teeth every day. Some students, especially younger ones, may try to skip these routines when their parents are not around, so gentle reminders, and sometimes firm encouragement, may be needed.

Laundry

Please provide access to your washing machine (and dryer if you use one) and detergent at no extra cost. Let the student know your household routine:

- Where to place dirty clothes.
- Where to hang wet clothes.
- Which days or times the washing is usually done.
- Who is responsible for operating the washing machine.

Some families prefer to do the student's washing together with the family laundry; others encourage older students to learn independence by doing their own. Either way is fine, as long as the student knows the expectation from the start.

If you use a clothesline, explain how to hang clothes securely so they dry properly. Please remind them that damp clothing should not be dried in bedrooms or bathrooms, as this can cause mould.

Hosts are expected to provide clean sheets and towels and to change or wash them at least once every one to two weeks. Show the student where to place their used items and how the routine works in your home.

Household Chores

Helping with light household chores is a good way for students to feel part of the family and to learn responsibility. It should never feel like "work" or a burden, but rather like pitching in as another member of the household.

Encourage them with kindness, and remember that in some cultures, children may not be expected to help at home, so this may be a new experience. Give clear instructions, especially the first few times. Keep your expectations light and reasonable. The goal is participation, not perfection.

Examples of simple chores:

- Helping with meal preparation (e.g. washing vegetables, fetching ingredients).
- Setting the table for dinner.
- Clearing their own dishes after meals and helping load/unload the dishwasher.
- Helping wipe the kitchen table or bench after meals.
- Taking out the rubbish or recycling.
- Watering plants or helping in the garden.
- Bringing in the washing from the clothesline.
- Folding their own laundry or putting away clean clothes.
- Keeping their own bedroom tidy and making their bed daily.

Pets

Pets often help students feel more at home and reduce homesickness. However, it's important to remember that not all students are familiar or comfortable with animals, and some may have allergies, fears, or cultural reservations.

Before placement, HHS will ask hosts to declare any pets in the home so that we can match students appropriately. If you are going to get a new pet after the placement has been confirmed or after the student has arrived, please let HHS know as soon as possible.

Hosts should introduce pets gradually and explain how to interact with them. Show the student how to approach the animal calmly, avoid sudden movements, and never tease, pull, or startle them. Remind students to wash their hands after touching pets, especially before eating. Pets should not be allowed in the student's bedroom or on their bedding to avoid allergies or hygiene issues.

If the student is frightened, allergic, or injured by a pet (even a small scratch or bite), please contact HHS straight away. We will provide guidance and, if needed, help arrange medical attention or other support.

Internet & Screen Time

We expect hosts to provide the student with unlimited Wi-Fi, as online access is essential for study and staying connected with their family. If there is a data limit, please explain this to your student and ask them to be mindful of their usage.

Most international calls are made via apps such as WeChat, WhatsApp, or Skype, so landline use is rarely needed. We encourage students to buy a New Zealand SIM card. Please assist them to get one with a suitable plan for everyday communication.

Screen Time Limits

Sometimes students spend a lot of time on their phones, tablets, or computers. Too much screen time can make it hard for them to engage with your family, practise English, and settle into their new environment. It is important to set clear boundaries and expectations from the very beginning:

- Talk openly about how devices are used in your household. Make it clear that family time and meals are phone-free, and that schoolwork takes priority over games or social media.
- Agree on reasonable limits together. For example, setting a "no devices in the bedroom after 9 p.m." rule is often very effective.
- Be consistent and firm. Some students may test the rules, especially if they don't have the same boundaries at home. Calm, consistent enforcement helps them adjust quickly.
- Support balance by encouraging healthy alternatives: joining in cooking, watching TV together, going for a walk, or chatting after dinner.

Sometimes the student's parents will set specific rules, such as requiring devices to be handed over at 9 p.m. each night and returned in the morning. If that's the case, we will inform you, and you are expected to help enforce those rules. Please explain clearly to the student that this is part of their parents' instructions, and not just a household preference.

Curfew & Supervision

Younger students need close supervision, especially in the evenings and overnight. An adult member of the host family should always be present and available while the student is at home. Please take a proactive approach: know where your student is, who they are with, and what time they are expected back.

Students Under 18

Set a reasonable curfew that suits the student's age and maturity level. Keep communication open and make sure the student knows to text or call if they are running late or plans change. If the student does not return home by curfew and has not contacted you, hosts should immediately try to reach them and then inform HHS if they cannot be contacted.

Suggested curfew times (to be adjusted with the student's age, maturity, and school guidelines):

- Under 15: home by 6:00 p.m.; outings only under adult supervision.
- 15–16 years: home by 6:00 p.m. Sunday–Thursday; 9:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday.
- 17 years: home by 6:00 p.m. Sunday–Thursday; 10:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

A responsible adult should be home at night whenever a student under 18 is present. Even during the day, leaving a younger student (under 14) alone at home is not appropriate. A responsible adult aged 18 or over must always be with the student.

If you are hosting a female student, she must not stay overnight in a household where only male family members are present. A female adult family member must always be in residence overnight. If you need to be away overnight, you must inform HHS so that a safe supervision plan can be put in place.

Students under 18 must not spend the night away from your home unless this has been approved by their parents or legal guardians and by their school. The same applies if you wish to take your student on a trip that involves spending the night away from home (such as camping, road trips, or holidays). Always check with HHS if you are unsure.

Students Over 18

Students over 18 are legally adults and generally have more independence. However, it is still important to know where they are and to ensure their wellbeing while in your care, and your house rules apply to them.

It is recommended to set a regular check-in time instead of a strict curfew, so you always know roughly when to expect them home. Keep communication open, agree on house expectations at the beginning, and remind them to be considerate of the household's routines.

Transport

It's the host's role to help the student travel safely and economically between home and school. Older students may be able to take the bus on their own once they have received clear instructions and practice. Younger students should be accompanied by the host or provided with transport to ensure safety. This arrangement will be discussed and agreed upon with the host before the placement begins, so expectations are clear for everyone.

Walking

If your home is within about 20 minutes' walking distance, students may walk once they are familiar with the route. Practise the route together and point out safe places to cross. Remind students that traffic travels on the left in New Zealand. Arrange car transport instead in bad weather.

Cycling & Scooters

If you plan to provide a bicycle or scooter for your student, please inform HHS in advance. We may need to obtain consent from the student's parents before they can use it. If the student has not cycled or used a scooter in New Zealand before, practise together in a safe area (such as a park or quiet street) before letting them go out alone.

Make sure the bike or scooter is roadworthy. A helmet must always be worn. Go over New Zealand road rules with your student, including riding on the left-hand side, obeying traffic signals, and using bike lanes where available. Talk through safe routes to school or local shops, and discourage use on busy roads. Show the student where it is safe to park their bike or scooter and how to lock it.

If an electric scooter is provided, please ensure it is set to a low speed limit for safety reasons.

Bus Travel

Some students may never have used public transport independently before, so guidance and reassurance are essential. Help your student get a bus card (Bee Card) so they can enjoy discounted fares. Walk your student to the bus stop the first few times, show them how to tag on and off with the bus card, show them how to use a real-time bus app to check timetables, and go through alternative options if a bus is cancelled or late.

In most cases, bus fares are included in the homestay package. This means that if the student needs to take the bus to and from school, the host is expected to cover the cost of fares, unless otherwise specified in advance. Make sure their bus card has enough balance and encourage them to carry a little extra cash for emergencies.

Host Transport

If you drive your student, ensure your car is registered, warranted, insured, and seatbelts are always used. If younger students need a booster seat, hosts are responsible for providing one.

From time to time, we may ask hosts to provide transport for short trips other than the daily school commute. For example, you might be asked to take a student to a group event, a sports practice, or the meeting point for an excursion. These requests are usually infrequent but are part of supporting the student's homestay experience.

If a student is to travel in a car driven by someone other than the host parents, HHS must be informed of the driver's details in advance and give approval before this arrangement goes ahead. Students are prohibited from taking a taxi or Uber on their own. They may only use such services if accompanied by the host parent or another approved adult.

Everyday transport to and from school, as well as short-distance travel, is considered part of hosting. However, special outings (e.g. long trips or optional activities) may require prior agreement on who will cover petrol or other costs.

School Attendence

Students are expected to attend all classes on time everyday. It is also a legal requirement under the Code of Practice. Please encourage good routines: organise their bags the night before, going to bed early, waking up on time, eating breakfast, and leaving home with enough time for a safe journey.

If the student is going to be late for school, please contact the school to let them know, and remind the student to report to the school office or reception before going to class. This ensures the school records them as present.

If a student is unwell and cannot attend school, the host must notify the school office as early as possible that morning. The host is also responsible for caring for the student at home while they are sick. If sickness lasts more than 3 days, the host should help the student visit a doctor and obtain a certificate, as many schools will ask for one. If in doubt, hosts should check with the school office about their specific attendance policy.

Any absence for reasons other than sickness must be approved in advance by the school and the student's parents.

Sickness & Emergency

The health and safety of students is our highest priority. Hosts play a vital role in making sure students are well cared for if they become unwell or if an emergency arises.

If a student is unwell and cannot attend school, the host is responsible for caring for them at home. Students under 14 must not be left at home without an adult present at any time. For students aged 14 or older, if you genuinely cannot take leave from work or other commitments (please try your best first), you must inform HHS and the school so we can arrange a back-up plan.

For minor illnesses (e.g. colds, headaches), hosts should provide rest, fluids, and you may offer the student simple over-the-counter remedies (e.g. paracetamol or throat lozenges), following the dosage on the packet. If the illness lasts more than 3 days, or if symptoms are concerning (e.g. high fever, vomiting, breathing difficulties), please accompany the student to visit a doctor and inform HHS. You may take the student to your family's regular GP if they accept casual or overseas patients. If your GP does not, please take the student to a walk-in or urgent care clinic, such as Tui Medical or Victoria Clinic, where no prior enrolment is needed.

If the student is seriously unwell or injured, call 111 immediately for an ambulance, then contact HHS as soon as possible. All accidents, even minor ones, should be reported to HHS and the school, and medical care sought if needed.

If the student visits a doctor, they are responsible for paying their own medical and doctor's fees. Please remind them to keep the receipt and medical certificate (if provided), as these are required to claim reimbursement from their insurance.

Please inform HHS promptly if:

- The student has an illness lasting more than 48 hours.
- There is a medical incident, accident, or hospital visit.
- You have concerns about their mental health or wellbeing.
- You are unsure whether a situation requires medical or school attention.

Insurance & Damage

Accidents sometimes happen, and it's important for both hosts and students to understand how insurance and responsibility work within a homestay arrangement. Clear communication and timely reporting help everyone handle these situations calmly and fairly.

All host families should have home and contents insurance that covers a student living in the property. Before hosting, please check with your insurance company to ensure your policy remains valid when a homestay student resides with you. In the event of accidental damage, your insurance may cover repair or replacement costs, depending on your policy. Keep receipts, photos, and any related documents if a claim needs to be made.

If something is accidentally damaged, please stay calm and contact HHS immediately rather than negotiating payment directly with the student. HHS will review what happened and, if needed, discuss compensation with the student's parents or education agent. In general, students or their parents are responsible for any intentional or careless damage, such as broken furniture, stained carpets, or lost keys.

Most damage can be prevented through simple care and good communication. Please take time to show students how to use household appliances safely. Remind them to handle items gently, avoid eating in their bedroom, and let you know straight away if something breaks or doesn't work properly. Often, a quick repair is much easier than fixing a long-term issue that wasn't reported.

Family Activities

Including students in family activities helps them feel welcome, part of the household, and practise their English. You don't need to plan anything fancy, what matters most is that the student feels included. Invite them to join in on ordinary family routines such as:

- Watching TV or movies together
- Helping with dinner preparation or baking
- Playing board games or sharing stories after dinner
- Going for a walk

Most students are eager to explore life outside the home, so please try to arrange at least one outing on the weekend. It doesn't have to be somewhere far or expensive — a short trip to the park, beach, shopping mall, or local market can be a great experience for them. Whenever possible, include the student in family outings like:

- Picnics, BBQs, or local festivals
- Day trips to the beach, lake, or nearby towns
- Family celebrations or gatherings
- Attending sports games or community events

If the student prefers quiet weekends, that's fine too. Just keep them informed of family plans so they never feel excluded.

Hosts should always inform HHS in advance if an activity involves travel outside the local area, overnight stays, or potentially risky activities. We will confirm with the student's parents and school before approval. Examples of risky activities are:

- Water sports (swimming at the beach, boating, kayaking, jet skiing, etc.)
- Hiking or tramping, especially in remote or bush areas
- Any activity where supervision or emergency support might be limited

You are not expected to pay for outings or activities that have a cost — the student should cover their own expenses. However, it's important to be clear and upfront about the cost before making plans. For example, you might say, "Would you like to come to the movies with us tonight? The ticket is about $15."

Cost of Fuel for Outings

If the outing is something the host invited the student to join as part of normal family life (for example, a Sunday drive, visiting relatives, or a local outing), the host would normally cover fuel costs as they would for any family member.

If the trip is specifically for the student's benefit, such as taking them sightseeing, or on an excursion they requested, it's reasonable to ask them to contribute to petrol costs. Be clear about this before going, for example, you might say, "We can go to Rotorua this weekend if you like, it's about 1.5 hours drive, so we'd ask you to please help with the petrol cost."

Religion

International students come from a wide range of cultural and religious backgrounds. It's important to respect and support each student's personal beliefs and practices. Be open-minded if their customs or views differ from yours. Avoid debating religion or trying to convert the student.

Some students may wish to pray, read religious texts, or observe certain dietary restrictions. Please allow them the privacy and freedom to do so. If a student wishes to attend a place of worship, such as a church, mosque, temple, or synagogue, please support this by helping with directions or transport arrangements if needed.

If your family attends church or other religious gatherings, you are welcome to invite your student to join you, but make it clear that participation is entirely optional. If your family says grace before meals or takes part in other religious customs, please explain what you are doing so the student understands the meaning behind it.

If your family follows a strict religious diet (for example, no pork, no beef, or restrictions on certain foods), you must inform HHS before the placement is confirmed. This ensures that we only match students who are comfortable with such restrictions and helps avoid misunderstandings later.

Healthy Lifestyle

Hosts play an important role in helping students maintain a balanced and healthy lifestyle while they are away from home. Encourage them to develop good habits just as you would with your own children. This includes:

- Provide a variety of nutritious meals with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and balanced portions of protein and carbohydrates.
- Limit processed foods, sugary snacks, soft drinks, and offer water or milk instead.
- Encourage regular exercise and outdoor activity.
- Make sure students get enough sleep and maintain a consistent routine.
- Help them find a healthy balance between study, relaxation, and screen use.
- Do not supply alcohol, cigarettes, or vaping products to anyone under 18. If you suspect underage drinking or smoking, contact HHS immediately.

Adjusting to a new country can be exciting but also stressful. Students may feel homesick, anxious, or tired. Be kind, patient, and available to listen. Encourage them to talk about how they're feeling, and let HHS know if you notice any worrying changes, such as isolation, frequent crying, or refusal to attend school.

Understanding Cultural Differences

Each student comes from a unique cultural background that shapes how they think, speak, and behave. Some of our everyday Kiwi habits may seem unusual to them, and vice versa. These differences are what make the homestay experience so special, but they can also lead to occasional misunderstandings if we don't recognise them early.

Communication Styles

In New Zealand, we tend to be open and direct in conversation. However, many students, especially from Asian countries, come from cultures that are more reserved or indirect.

For example, a student might say “maybe later” or smile politely instead of saying “no.” In some cultures, a “yes” or a nod may simply mean “I hear you,” not “I agree.” Kiwis often see eye contact as a sign of honesty and engagement, but some students may avoid it as a gesture of respect. If you’re unsure what a student means, or if the student seems unsure, it’s perfectly okay to ask gently for clarification.

Body Language

In New Zealand, hugs, shoulder pats, or cheek kisses are common among friends and family. Students from more conservative cultures, such as Muslim or Asian, may not be comfortable with physical contact, particularly between genders. When unsure, use open and neutral body language, and give extra personal space.

Smiling can mean different things too. In many Asian cultures, a smile might be used to hide embarrassment or discomfort rather than happiness. Students might not express emotions as openly as Kiwis do. A neutral or serious face doesn’t necessarily mean they’re unhappy, it might just be their cultural norm.

Customs & Manners

Daily routines can differ greatly between cultures, from eating and greeting to hygiene and social etiquette.

Some students may not be used to removing shoes indoors, saying “please” and “thank you” often, or sharing household chores. Eating styles and table manners can differ too. For example, slurping noodles or eating noisily is polite in some Asian countries — it shows enjoyment of the food. Rather than correcting too quickly, please explain Kiwi customs kindly and model the behaviour.

Family Interaction

In some cultures, family life is very private and quiet; in others, it’s lively and full of shared time together. Some students may initially spend a lot of time in their room, not because they’re unfriendly, but because that’s what feels familiar to them, or because they’re afraid of making mistakes in English. Encourage them to join the family gently. For example, by inviting them to watch TV or help with dinner.

Independence & Rules

Students may come from homes where expectations are quite different. Some are used to parents doing everything for them — laundry, cleaning, meals — while others are very independent. Explain your household rules kindly and early. For example, curfew times, device use, chores, or shower schedules. If the student breaks a rule, handle it calmly — they might not realise it's a problem. Explain why the rule exists rather than just saying "don't."

The best way to bridge cultural gaps is with curiosity and kindness. Ask questions when you're unsure, show interest in their country, and share your own Kiwi traditions too. Please remember — what feels "normal" to you may be completely new to your student.

Culture Shock

Moving to a new country is exciting, but it also comes with challenges. Most international students go through a stage called "culture shock" — a natural part of adapting to a completely new way of living.

Culture shock can happen when students experience differences in language, food, weather, daily routines, and even communication styles. It's common for students to go through several stages: initial excitement, followed by homesickness, confusion, or frustration, and then gradual adjustment as they settle in.

Signs of Culture Shock

Hosts might notice the student:

- Becomes unusually quiet, withdrawn, or spends long hours alone.
- Loses interest in talking or joining family activities.
- Has changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- Seems homesick, irritable, or easily upset.

These are normal reactions to change, not a sign of bad manners or disrespect.

How Hosts Can Help

You can make a big difference by offering patience, encouragement, and consistency:

- Be kind and gentle; small acts of care can mean a lot.
- Keep daily routines stable (e.g. meal times, school runs, family time).
- Involve them in family activities, even if they are hesitant at first.
- Show interest in their culture, ask questions, try their food, or learn a few words in their language.
- Offer familiar foods occasionally to comfort them.

- Praise their efforts; small successes like catching the bus alone or speaking English more confidently can really boost their confidence.

If you notice the student struggling for a long time or showing signs of ongoing distress, please contact HHS. We can provide extra support or liaise with their school and parents if needed.

Language Barrier

Communication can sometimes be a challenge at the beginning of a homestay, especially if English is not the student's first language. Even students with strong written English may find it difficult to understand fast speech, slang, or New Zealand accents. It's perfectly normal.

When students first arrive, they may be quiet or shy, not because they're unfriendly, but because they're afraid of making mistakes or not understanding you. Many have never spoken English daily before, so they're learning to listen, think, and respond all at once, which can be exhausting for them.

Tips for Clear Communication

- Speak slowly and clearly. Avoid raising your voice; slowing down is much more effective than speaking louder.
- Keep sentences simple. Use plain English and avoid idioms or slang (for example, instead of "I'm knackered," say "I'm very tired").
- Check for understanding. Ask open questions like "Can you tell me what you'll do tomorrow?" instead of "Do you understand?"
- Be aware of your accent. Kiwi English can sound fast or unfamiliar; pronounce words clearly and avoid shortening phrases too much.
- Use gestures and facial expressions. Point, smile, and demonstrate where possible.
- Write things down. Notes for house rules, Wi-Fi passwords, or routines can be easier for students to read than to hear.

Encouraging Confidence

- Create a relaxed environment where mistakes are okay, laugh together if something is misunderstood.
- Encourage the student to speak English at home as much as possible, even if slowly. Compliment their effort rather than their accuracy.
- Include them in everyday conversation — at meals, while driving, or watching TV — so they can naturally pick up expressions and pronunciation.
- If you can, help them learn local terms (like "jandals," "dairy," or "mate") once they're comfortable with the basics.

Conflict Resolution

Even in the most caring homes, small misunderstandings or disagreements can happen. Living together across different cultures, languages, and expectations can lead to moments of tension — this is completely normal. What matters most is how these situations are handled.

If a problem arises with your student's behaviour, attitude, or communication, please try to address it calmly and directly with them, just as you would with a family member. Most issues can be resolved quickly through gentle conversation and clear explanation.

- Choose a quiet time to talk privately and respectfully.
- Focus on the behaviour or situation, not the person.
- Use simple, positive language and give examples so the student understands.
- Encourage the student to share their feelings too.

If the issue continues, or if you feel uncomfortable handling it on your own, contact HHS. We are here to help mediate and find a fair solution that works for everyone. We can arrange a meeting, assist with translation if needed, and provide cultural guidance to help both sides understand each other better.

In our experience, most conflicts come from cultural misunderstandings or lack of communication, not bad intentions. Try to look at the situation through the student's cultural lens. For example, in some cultures, students may avoid eye contact or may not express gratitude verbally, even though they mean no disrespect.

The most successful homestay experiences are built on understanding and open communication. By spending time together, showing patience, and creating an atmosphere where the student feels safe to speak honestly, small concerns can be addressed before they grow into bigger problems. When students feel truly heard, supported, and respected, they not only thrive in your home but also carry those positive memories and lessons with them long after they return home.