Homestay Family Handbook

Welcome to the ELS Language Centers/Ruston Homestay Program! This Homestay Family Booklet has been compiled to provide you with pertinent and necessary information about participating in our program that provides homestays to ELS students. This booklet is not designed to stand-alone. It should be read along with two other pieces of information. These are: the ELS Student Homestay Booklet, which allows you to see and know what information is provided to the students about their homestay expectations and accommodations and the ELS Language Centers English Language Programs brochure which describes for you the English program in which your student is enrolled.

Brief Overview of the ELS Language Centers’ Intensive English Program

ELS Language Centers has provided English instruction nationwide to over 1 million international students since 1961. The ELS Language Centers/Ruston branch opened on January 1, 2005 on the campus of Louisiana Tech located on Wisteria Street on the second floor of the Student Center.

The ELS Language Centers’ Intensive English Program operates in 4-week sessions. There are 13 sessions each year when students arrive and depart from the program. Of course, not all students depart after four weeks of study. The average length of study is 2.5 sessions. The students attend 30 class hours of English classes weekly Monday – Friday. Classes operate from 8:15 am – 3:30 pm with classes on Fridays only from 8:15 am – 12:05 am. Excursions are offered two or three days on weekends each session and are typically out-of-town activities. Homestay students may reside in their homestays for 4, 8, 12, etc. weeks. (Homestays of more than 20 weeks are rare.)

Students are given a placement examination that assigns the student to any one of twelve levels of English proficiency (Levels 101 – 112). The program is divided into three Beginning levels (101-103), three Intermediate levels (104-106), three Advanced levels (107-109) and three Masters levels (110-112). In addition to Structure/Speaking Practice (SSP) class, Conversation class, Reading/Writing class and Learning Technology Center (LTC), students may (dependent upon level) select elective classes which include TOEFL Prep, Business English (finance, marketing and management by rotation), American Idioms, Pronunciation, Grammar Review, American Film, Professionally Speaking and others. **Students typically receive 1 – 2 hours of homework nightly.** Students who successfully complete the requirements for each level progress to the next level for the next 4-week session if they continue. Those students who do not successfully meet the requirements to pass the level repeat the level for the next 4-week session.
Students who complete the ELS Language Centers Program (Level 112) are determined to have achieved a high level of English language proficiency. In fact, over 600 colleges and universities throughout the U.S. accept ELS Level 112 to satisfy the English language requirements for admission to all undergraduate and many graduate degree programs. ELS Language Centers is the only English-as-a-Second Language program in the U.S. that provides its graduates with a guarantee.

Goals of the Homestay Program

The goal of the ELS Homestay Program is to provide an interesting, cultural and educational experience for both student and family. The more interaction between family and student, the more enriching the stay will be for both.

ELS students come from around the world to improve their English language skills. The best way for them to speed their progress in learning English and to gain first-hand cultural understanding of the people of the United States is to live with an American family while studying at ELS. This unforgettable and valuable experience provides a lifetime of memories for both the ELS student and the American family. Before you commit to being a homestay family, please reexamine your schedule to be sure you can provide the time and energy to meet the goals stated above.

What are homestay families required to provide?

Furnishings:

Homestay families must provide each ELS student with a private bedroom, unless the student has requested to share a room with another student (for example, two sisters or two brothers together). There is a maximum of only two ELS students in the same homestay. We always try to mix nationalities of students, and we try to avoid having two students in the same homestay that speak the same language.

The student’s bedroom furnishings must include the following: bed (futons must be approved by the homestay organizer prior to student assignment), dresser, closet, night table or stand and good lighting for study. While a desk and chair placed in the student’s bedroom provide a quiet study area for him/her to do homework, these are not required to be in the student’s bedroom. These furnishings may be elsewhere in the home so long as the study area offers a quiet workspace.

The student should be provided access to all common areas of the home (kitchen, living room, family room, game room (if present), etc.)
Linens & Towels

You are expected to provide your student(s) with clean linens and towels once or twice per week, dependent upon the exchange pattern of your home.

Bathroom

Bathroom may be a private or shared bathroom. If many family members are using a shared bathroom, it may be a good idea to post a schedule of grooming time/showers/baths, etc.

Language in the home

We require all homestay families to speak English. Certainly, there are families who have immigrated to the U.S., and English is their second language. ELS has determined that, due to the inherent goal of English language study of our students, such homestay families should speak English with near-native fluency and possess accents that are not uncharacteristic of American regional dialects.

Meals

Students must receive fourteen (14) meals weekly as part of their homestay experience. These meals are breakfast and dinner Mondays – Fridays and Breakfast (or brunch) and dinner on Saturdays and Sundays.

Breakfast/Brunch

Some homestay parents prepare breakfasts (full or continental) for their student(s). Since many homestay parents work during the week, breakfast may also be a self-help meal where your student prepares his/her own breakfast. If this is the case in your home, you must show your student(s) around the kitchen and show where the cooking utensils and breakfast foods are kept. A typical continental breakfast might include the following: juice, coffee or tea with milk, cold or hot cereals and breads, bagels or muffins with butter and jelly or jam. Sometimes families prepare full breakfasts with ham or bacon with eggs on the weekends when the pressure of getting to work on time is not present. If families sleep later on weekends, brunch may also substitute for breakfast and is usually served between 10:30 am and 1:30 pm.
Dinner

Dinner is a time when students value practicing their English in conversation about the day’s activities. It is also an excellent time for you and your family to really get to know your student. The homestay parent(s) and/or family is expected to have dinners with ELS students four or five nights per week. Dinners together for four - five nights weekly provide sharing time where the family members and student discuss the day’s events or activities and/or upcoming events/activities. Current events are popular topics to discuss over dinners. Traditionally, dinners together are prime conversational time.

Dinner should be a hot meal prepared with a main course (usually meat, poultry or fish), a salad, one or two vegetables and a beverage. There may be fruit or sweets served for dessert. Meals should be nourishing and the menus should be varied. Dinner should be a time for sharing the day’s events. This is a time when the students value practicing English. Ask your student(s) if they have a food preference or any dietary restrictions, and invite the student to accompany you to the supermarket. Ask if they would sometimes like to help you prepare a meal from their country.

Due to homestay parent commitments outside of the home (perhaps for children’s school meetings, church meetings, etc.) two or three nights of the week, there may be occasional need for your student to have dinner alone. If you will not be home at dinnertime for such activities, you must provide your student(s) with instructions of how to prepare dinner. Generally, you will leave prepared foods in the refrigerator or on a dinner plate that the student will heat in the microwave oven. Please provide your student with as much advanced notice when such special dinner arrangements must be made, and please try to keep them to a minimum during the student’s stay with you.

Just as you may have to miss dinners with your student(s) and will so advise him/her/ them, you should explain to your student(s) the importance of letting you know if s/he/they will be late for meals or miss meals. Let your students know that the more advance notice that can be given the better it will be for you in your family dinnertime planning for your family.
What about student lunches and snacks?

**Lunches**

You are not required to provide lunches for your student(s). Lunches are not included in our homestay program, but your student has several choices for lunch or mid-day meals. If your student wishes to prepare and bring his/her lunch to school each day, please take your student(s) with you to the grocery store or supermarket where s/he/they may buy lunch foods to keep in your family refrigerator. Your student(s) may also decide to add money to their Tech Express card to have lunches in Tech's food court where the ELS dormitory students receive their meals.

**Snacks**

In-between meal snack foods such as cookies, fruit, candy, potato chips, ice cream, coca cola and other drinks are not included in the homestay program fees. If your student wishes to have these foods on hand in the home for his/her own consumption, it is your student’s (s’) responsibility to buy them. Your student(s) may accompany you to the grocery store/supermarket to select and buy these extra snacks/beverages and specialty foods to keep in the family refrigerator and pantry. Please respect these items and do not allow other family members to consume them without the student’s (s’) permission. Also, please advise your student(s) that it is not a good idea to bring or keep food in the bedroom(s), because it may spoil or attract insects.

What are my transportation obligations?

Students are assigned homestay families whose homes are located in safe and respectable areas of the city. The travel time from homestays to the ELS Language Center at Louisiana Tech is usually 20 – 30 minutes each way. **The maximum allowable travel time each way is 45 minutes from the door of your home to the door of the Center.** Most families bring students to ELS on their way to work and pick students up on their way home from work. Some families who live near one another may wish to carpool in the morning and afternoon. It is very important that students not arrive late for their first class, which begins at 8:15 am. **Homestay families may not charge students extra for transporting them to and from the Center.**
At times during weekday evenings and on certain weekends, ELS sponsors Student Activities such as bowling, roller-skating, shopping trips, on-campus entertainment or trips to other states, etc. Please help arrange for your student to participate in these extra activities. It may mean carpooling or additional trips to drop and pick up your student, but his/her participation in these activities is important to his/her total ELS experience. An activity calendar is given to students the first day of classes. Please ask your student to see it or let the Center know and one will be sent home for you with your student.

In addition to the above-mentioned provisions for your homestay student, it goes without saying that Hospitality and Friendship are expected of the family!

What other matters are important to know for a successful homestay experience?

Use of equipment in the home

The student’s way of life in his/her home country is probably quite different from our lifestyles. Just among those who live in the U.S., there are many variations. You will need to discuss your house rules as soon as the student is rested and comfortable from his travel. Show him how to use the kitchen appliances, TV, DVD/VCR, washer, dryer, microwave oven, etc. and make him/her aware of any restrictions. Note whether your student is absorbing your instructions, if not, perhaps notes should be provided for the use of each item. Discuss necessary subjects: meal times, self-help breakfast (if appropriate), telephone usage, access to refrigerator, food/beverages not available to them (ie: snacks), home smoking policy, laundry procedures and frequency, etc.

Be Tolerant of cultural differences

Be tolerant of manners that differ from ours. While they may seem unacceptable in our culture, they are acceptable in the student’s culture. Discuss these differences without being critical and let students know which behaviors are unacceptable in your home and even inappropriate in our culture. Some students may not say “please” and “thank you”, as such is not done in their own homes/cultures. Appreciation may be shown in other ways instead. The more you and your students communicate, the more your student will learn what are acceptable and appropriate behaviors, and you will learn about other cultures.
Student Personal Hygiene

Some personal hygiene habits will differ from country to country, such as bathing, shaving, and laundraing. In some cultures, body odor is completely acceptable, in fact, people just smell like people. This is contrary to the attitudes in western cultures where we aim to cloak our body odors with the use of deodorants, perfumes and colognes. If you determine this to be a problem, please contact the ELS Center for assistance and suggestions in how best to approach these somewhat sensitive topics for students.

Share Your Lifestyle

Share your lifestyle with your student and make him/her part of the family to a great extent, but not fully. For example, never discuss personal or financial problems with your student(s). Arguments are part of the life of every family, but please keep this apart from the student and do not involve him/her. Instead, talk about the things you enjoy: movies, music, gardening, collecting, sports, etc. and find out what your student’s interests are. Ask about your student’s family, their countries, lifestyles, etc. The more you communicate, the more you will learn from each other. This helps provide your student with a relaxed atmosphere in your home.

Student Problems

If you become aware of a personal problem or difficulty that your student is experiencing (whether school-related or personal), please bring this to the attention of the ELS Staff. Such matters are kept confidential unless the contrary is necessary and approved in order to provide a solution.

Napping

Expect students to nap often after school. This is common in many countries. Also, they may be exhausted after having to use English all the time. Many students continue to nap daily all the years they stay in the U.S.

Student Participation in Family Activities

Always invite your student(s) to participate in family activities or outings. Since the student has selected the homestay accommodation option, it is assumed that s/he will want to interact with you and your family in this way to improve her/his English skills.
Communication with Your Student

Encourage your student(s) to use a foreign language/English dictionary, especially if s/he is at the beginning or intermediate English levels (ELS Levels 101 – 106). Most students have one. Please exercise caution with respect to how much your student understands you. You may find that your student will indicate that s/he understands you only to discover that very little was understood. If your student fails to understand your instructions, try rephrasing and speak slowly and clearly. It is tiring initially for students to hear and speak continuously in English; however, encourage students to talk no matter how poor their English skills.

Household duties and tasks (chores)

Some families assign students, as is the case with other family members, some simple and light household duties or chores. Students should be encouraged to make their beds and keep their rooms neat and clean. Students may be asked to help set the meal table with plates and flat wear (knives, forks, spoons) and/or help to clear the table after the meals and perhaps help wash the dishes. Some students are also asked to help with minor chores (small tasks) in the home (ie: taking out the garbage, rolling the garbage container to the curb along with the recycle bin, etc. We ask students not to think of these duties as work. They should accept it as being part of a family and make a chore a learning experience and/or a time for conversation.

It is important that our homestay families understand that we do not want any of our students in homestays to be maids, servants or housekeepers as they are paying for their homestays. Rather, we have informed students that they may be expected, as temporary members of their American families, to help with household chores that are shared among the family members.

One chore that may be a shared household duty is babysitting; however, you should not expect babysitting from your student. S/he may not have the communicative skills to do so and may put your child at risk in the event of an emergency. Please consider the degree of risk and responsibility as well as the communicative level of your student if you assign chores. You may want to ask for an occasional favor of your student, but it is important to remember that s/he is not a hired babysitter, handyman or au pair.

Access to the home

Access to the home may vary among families. Some families are comfortable giving the student a key to come and go as s/he wishes. Other families may have children who are under curfew and may want their student to follow the same requirements, especially if their ages are similar. Whichever is the case in your home, please explain your expectations to your student about acceptable times to be home at night and home security. It would be appropriate for you to ask the student to give you an approximate time when s/he will be home each evening so that you will not worry and phone numbers to call if changes occur.
Respect the Student’s Religious Beliefs

Please respect the religion of your student. Do not try to convert him/her to your faith. You may certainly invite your student to attend church services with you, and s/he may accept for politeness or curiosity reasons. But if your student does not accept your invitation to go, please do not impose such upon the student. Remember; put yourself in your student’s shoes. If you were in your student’s country would you appreciate someone trying to impose a different religion upon you?

Physical Contact

Physical contact ranges from culture to culture, just as is this case within our own. Members of some cultures kiss once maybe twice at each greeting while members of other cultures never touch unless it is in private or only in public if among their own family members. If hugs and kisses are part of your family’s lifestyle, explain to your student that this is the way you show concern and caring, but be perceptive to the student’s reaction, and do not push for a reciprocal expression.

Vacations/Weekend Trips

At various times during the year, homestay families wish to take vacations or weekend trips. If you would like to invite your student with you on a vacation or trip, and it does not conflict with the student’s school schedule, you are free to do so. If the student will be responsible for any expenses, it is very important that these expenses be made known to him/her at the time the trip is discussed with him/her. No one likes unexpected expenses! If you will be away from home at all during your student’s stay, you must discuss such with the Homestay Coordinator in advance of receiving your assigned student who will determine if your student should be moved to another home temporarily during your time away.

If you know you will be on a family vacation for a week or two during a session of study, it is recommended that you not host a student during that session. If an unexpected emergency arises that requires you to leave town (ie: illness or death in the family, unexpected job-related travel, etc.), please discuss this with the Homestay Coordinator as soon as possible to discuss arrangements for your student during the time you will be away.

Use of Family Vehicles

We discourage families from allowing students to use family motor vehicles due to the liability issues involved. Students should be advised to either rent or buy vehicles if they are planning to be in the U.S. for an extended period.

Use of Family Telephones

You will need to carefully explain your expectations of your student with respect to use of your telephone. It is a good idea to establish an acceptable length of time for personal telephone calls and, perhaps, the number of phone calls received or made daily. Please be
reasonable with your student about telephone restrictions. We wouldn’t want him/her to feel that s/he is subject to the “one telephone call” as is permitted by jail inmates!

Students are informed that the use of your telephone is a privilege that should not be abused. If you wish your student(s) to ask you when s/he may use the telephone, please inform your student of such. Students are told to keep their telephone calls brief. If a family member needs to use the telephone, the student(s) should give up the phone for another to use it, especially if one must make an immediate phone call. All long distance phone calls must be made either “collect” or by using a phone card which can be at local convenience stores, as ELS cannot be responsible for phone calls made by students. Do not allow your student to make long distance calls and charge them to your telephone. If you discover that this has occurred, please notify the Homestay Organizer who will notify the appropriate ELS staff about the incident(s) and seek proper resolution to the matter. ELS Language Centers does not require money as a telephone deposit from students living in homestays.

Please talk with your student about “900 or 976 numbers” (adult lines, psychic lines, etc.) that they may see advertised on television and have expensive costs associated with them. You must advise your student that s/he is not permitted to call these 900 numbers.

You should advise your student of the appropriate and inappropriate times to receive phone calls from friends and family in his/her home country, especially since in many instances there are time differences of several hours. Your student must tell her/his family and friends back home not to call your home late at night when the family is sleeping unless there is an emergency that cannot wait until morning. Late night phone calls are sources of anxiety for many families and may wake up family members who cannot go back to sleep thereafter.

Am I responsible for medical expenses if my student becomes ill or is injured?

Absolutely not! All ELS students have medical and hospitalization insurance either through ELS Language Centers, through an independent insurance company in their home country that extends coverage to the U.S. or through the student’s own travel insurance. It is always a good idea to ask your student to provide you with copies of his/her medical insurance information for emergencies. All ELS students who have paid for medical insurance through ELS Language Centers have an insurance ID card that is updated each session that the student is enrolled.

For your information, the plan provided to students who elect their coverage through ELS Language Centers has the following basic provisions:

1. There is a $50 deductible for doctor visits.
2. There is a $100 deductible for Emergency room visits
3. There is no dental coverage provided unless there is an accident to sound teeth.
How do I receive payment for homestay student(s) living in my home?

ELS students pay the ELS Registrar tuition fees for each 4-week session of study. Students who reside in the campus residence hall or in homestays also pay these accommodations fees to ELS. ELS will send you a check each session. Homestay fees are paid during the first few days the student is living in your home. **Homestay families should never collect fees directly from students.**

Families will receive a 1099 for tax purposes.

What do I do if I experience homestay-related problems?

Notify ELS Staff. An administrator will then offer an immediate recommendation or solution or delay a response until she/he has the opportunity to discuss the situation with other appropriate ELS staff members.

Conclusion

We hope that this booklet has provided you with the information you should have to make your participation in the ELS Homestay Program a successful and rewarding experience for you and your family.

The experience of homestay families can best be summed up as follows:

The student is here to learn about American family life from an insider’s point of view, but although an inside learner, the student remains essentially an outsider to long-standing family ties, the family’s shared history and the special sense of loyalty felt exclusively by family members.

As a learner and a friend, the student participates in the family’s normal day-to-day activities. Through discussions, the student learns about the family’s values, beliefs, outlook and historical roots. Over time and with continued involvement, the student usually develops a strong friendship with family members, a relationship of deep caring and high mutual regard.

Through involvement with the family, the school and the community, the student builds a foundation for understanding the culture of the United States.”

-- Writer unknown

As you can see, there appears to be two basic dimensions to being a homestay family for an international student: (1) sharing your lifestyle with a person from another country, and (2) providing a helping hand.

We hope you will, therefore, open your home and your heart to our students who want to get to know you and your family, learn English and learn about our culture with your help.

(Note: If there is a topic or question that you have that has been omitted in this booklet, please let us know so that information may be included in its next version.)