Guidelines for a Successful Family Stay

Most students say that the family stay is the best part of their program! Right now you may be a little nervous about being in a different culture and living with a family you don’t know. We want you to know that the apprehension you feel is perfectly normal.

All of the families who agree to host a Concordia Language Villages - Xperitas student are volunteers (Europe) or receive a minimal stipend to defray expenses (Latin America). Your host family is interested in getting to know you. It is their expectation that you would like to get to know them as well! It truly takes both sides to build a successful experience. To help you to do your part, we offer the following practical suggestions.

Remember that it is normal to feel uncomfortable during the first couple days of the family stay. Adjustment occurs gradually, and toward the end of their stay and most students wish they could stay longer. If you need to contact your group leader during the family stay, first make sure you have given yourself time to make this adjustment. If you feel threatened or in danger, call your leader right away.

Express common courtesies whenever you can; “Good morning,” “Good evening,” “Please” and “Thank you” will go a long way in establishing a relationship. Greet your family every morning and wish them a good night before bedtime.

Always maintain a positive attitude. Try new foods, initiate conversation and participate in family activities. Don’t spend your time in your room away from others; try your best to communicate and spend time with your family members. Not eating or isolating yourself may cause your family to think you are unhappy or ill.

Adapt yourself to their schedule and ways of doing things. Don’t expect them to adapt to you! Part of the learning experience of the family stay is becoming acquainted with the differences in other cultures. Good examples include different meal times and foods.

Offer to pay your own entrance fees (for example: public transportation, restaurant meals, and movies) if your host family or host brother/sister takes you places. Your host family has
invited you to their home to partake in the family’s daily activities, including family meals. 
They have been instructed to follow their regular routine so that you may learn what life is 
really like in the country you are visiting. They are not expected to be your tour guide.

Please conserve water and energy. Since water and electricity are very costly abroad, limit 
yourself to one short shower each day and turn off lights and appliances you’re not using. Such 
energy-saving actions are much more common abroad than in the U.S.

Please make your bed each morning and keep your room tidy. Do not leave your clothes or 
other items on the floor or scattered about the house. Get dressed before breakfast. No robes 
or pajamas at the table. Remember to bring slippers to avoid having to go barefoot in the 
home!

Always ask permission to use the stereo, TV, radio, computer, telephone, etc. If you need to 
call the U.S., only do so with your own phone or to avoid high charges to the host family. 
Skype or FaceTime are also very economical. Remember that not all families will have access 
to the Internet or Wi-Fi; if your host family does, limit your time online and remain present 
and active in the family’s activities.

Become a member of the family. Offer to help with chores such as setting the table, cooking, 
shopping, etc. Do not expect to be entertained, waited on or driven around. In short, act like a 
family member and not a spoiled guest!

Focus on getting to know your host family. Do not call your American friends, spend time 
texting back and forth or making plans to meet them. You only have a short time to spend with 
your host family; make the most of it!

Honor the Concordia Language Villages - Xperitas Code of Conduct during the family stay. If 
anyone should offer you cigarettes or alcoholic beverages such as beer or wine, simply say 
“No, thank you.” The Code of Conduct applies to YOU, not to the host family members or 
others you meet during the family stay.
Take a scrapbook or photo album. These are great tools to “break the ice” at the start of your family stay and provide basic information to your host family about you and your life in the U.S. They are curious about you and your life too!

Hand out any gifts that you bring for your host family within the first few hours of meeting them. Something from your home region is nice. The small gift(s) you have brought for the host family should be wrapped and presented with thanks. This is an excellent way to get started, showing your appreciation and explaining the gift.

Leave your host family a thank you note upon completion of the program. This is vitally important! A holiday greeting card is also a nice gesture when the time comes. This type of follow-up on your part will mean a great deal to the host family.

Always remember this: The success of your family stay depends as much on YOU as on your hosts. Do your part and you will have a successful family stay!

“I find it amazing that my family wanted to take in a perfect stranger and show me how they live in Spain. The time I spent with the family I learned that even though we are from very different cultures, we are all similar. The teenagers in Spain like to be silly and have fun just like the teenagers in America. I also felt that I learned so much Spanish from my five short days with my family. I really hope that someday I can see them again.”

Laura M., Spain program participant