

HOMESTAY STUDENT HANDBOOK

Welcome to the Agape Homestay Program!

Agape English Language Institute for Internationals would like to welcome you as a participant in our homestay program. This program has been designed to provide you with not only a room and board program. It also is meant to give you the opportunity to make friends, learn about American culture and provide opportunities to practice English outside of class.

This handbook has been prepared to help you enjoy all the benefits of your homestay experience. **It is your responsibility and to your benefit to read it carefully.** Please ask your host family parents or host, or the Agape Homestay Coordinator any questions you may have. This handbook will inform you what you, as a paying guest, can expect from your homestay family or host. It will also inform you what your homestay family or host expects of you while living in their home.

The keys to a successful homestay experience are *understanding* and *flexibility*. If misunderstandings occur please speak to one of the individuals mentioned above for help. *Allow your expectations to be flexible and you will better adapt to the new living environment of your homestay.*

We hope you will enjoy your homestay and that you will make many new friends during your studies with Agape.

Homes

Unlike college or university residence halls (dormitories) where every bedroom, bathroom, dresser, bed, desk, etc. is the same, your homestay accommodations will vary depending upon the homestay family. Some homestay students will be in houses while others may be in apartments or condominiums. Sizes of the bedrooms, the types of dressers and desks and shared or private bathrooms will all be different from home to home. All of the homestay families or hosts who have been selected to participate in this program will provide comfortable accommodations. It is most important that you understand that each Agape homestay family is ***different, not better*** than another.

Families

The Agape homestay program has many different kinds of living arrangements. You may be in a homestay with a married couple with or without children, a single parent with children living in the home, a retired couple whose children are now grown or a single person. All of the host families or hosts in our program have an interest in you, the newly-arrived international student. Providing you with a pleasant living and learning experience in their homes while you are enrolled at Agape is their goal. You can feel comfortable knowing that your homestay family or host is there to help you when you need it.

Do I Really Want a Homestay?

While you or your parents may have decided that a homestay is the best housing option, a homestay is really more than just a place to stay during your English studies. A homestay requires that you share living space, the telephone and transportation with other persons; therefore, you will have to respect the rights and needs of others as well. There will also be certain rules that you will have to obey. If you require considerable privacy and the ability to “come and go” as you wish (please), a homestay may not be as suitable as living in an apartment or other kinds of housing.

What Is Included in My Homestay?

Homestay Session

Your homestay may be for part or the entire time of your studies at Agape. Each homestay session corresponds to the Agape nine-week session study schedule (Note: Some students may enroll for a four-week session). Arrival at the homestay is usually scheduled the Sunday before the Agape session begins. Students who will not continue as students at Agape must move out of their homestays on the Saturday after the session ends.

Location of Homestays

Your family's home is located in a safe and respectable area of the city. The travel time from your homestay to Agape is usually 20-30 minutes each way. Some families bring students to Agape on their way to their work and pick students up on their way home from work.

Your Living Space in Your Homestay

You will be provided a **private bedroom** in your homestay unless you have requested to share a room with another student (for example, two sisters or two brothers). We always try to mix nationalities of students and we try not to have two students in the same homestay that speak the same language. We require all homestay families to speak English.

You will also be provided a **study area**. Your study area may be in your bedroom or another area of the home.

Please ask your host before you try to put anything on the walls of your bedroom (i.e., posters, pictures, etc.).

Linens

Fresh (clean) sheets and towels will be provided to you by your homestay parent(s) one time or two times each week. She/he will tell you which day towels and linens are exchanged. If you need to exchange your towels or linens more often, please discuss this with your homestay parent.

Meals Included in Your Homestay

Breakfast

A **continental breakfast** and **dinner** seven (7) days per week are included in your homestay fees. Some homestay parents or hosts prepare breakfasts for their student(s). Since many homestay parents or hosts work during the week, breakfast may be a self-help meal where you prepare your own breakfast. If this is the case in your homestay, your homestay parent will show you around the kitchen and show you 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 your homestay parent will prepare larger breakfasts on the weekends with ham or bacon and eggs. This is a full breakfast. Brunch may also substitute for breakfast on weekends. (**Brunch** is a combination of **Breakfast** and **Lunch** type foods usually served between 10:30 am and 1:30 pm.)

Dinner

Your dinner is usually 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. The homestay parent/family is

expected to have dinners with Agape students four or five nights per week. Dinner is an excellent time for you to practice your English and really get to know your homestay parent and family members.

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, you may need to have your dinner alone. If the homestay parent will not be home, you will receive instructions of how to prepare your dinner. Generally, your homestay parent will leave prepared foods in the refrigerator or on a dinner plate that you will heat in the microwave oven.

Since dining times vary in countries throughout the world, you should find out what time your homestay parent(s) will serve dinner. Dinnertime in the US is typically much earlier than in other countries (usually 6:00 - 7:30 pm).

You may need to modify your "biological clock" to eat earlier than you are accustomed, and you may need to purchase some snack foods if you become hungry late at night. Your homestay parent is not expected to prepare a dinner for the family at 6:30 pm and another dinner for you at 10:00 pm.

If you will not be coming home for dinner on any evening, it is common courtesy and expected that you will tell your homestay parent(s) in advance or call and leave a message on the family answering machine. If you will not be home for dinner, please tell your host one day before. If you do not know one day before, then please tell your host early in the day that you will not be home for dinner that evening. You should not bring guests to dinner without advance permission of your homestay parent(s).

Meals NOT Included in Your Homestay

Lunches

Lunches are not included in your homestay fees, but you have several choices for your lunch or mid-day meals. If you wish to prepare and bring your lunch to school each day, please ask your homestay to take you with them to the grocery store or supermarket where you may buy lunch foods to keep in the family refrigerator.

Snacks

In-between meal snack foods such as cookies, fruit, candy, potato chips, ice cream, coca cola and other drinks are not included in your homestay fees. If you wish to have these foods, it is your responsibility to buy them. You may buy these extra snacks/beverages and specialty foods and keep them in the family refrigerator and pantry. It is not a good idea to bring or keep food in your bedroom, because it may spoil or attract insects.

What Are My Responsibilities While Living in My Homestay?

Homestay Courtesy and Respect

Remember:

Always say "thank you" when your homestay family or someone at Agape shows you kindness. Say "please" when you ask for something. Basically, Americans are informal, but these words when used will help your American friends realize that you value their friendship. It is always better to say these words too much than not enough.

Mutual respect is expected in homestays. For, some students, the role of women in the US may be different than in your own country. The American household is run on an **equal basis**, and women should be treated with the same respect, attention and consideration as shown to men.

Although money is paid to your homestay host, you are not paying for a hotel room or apartment where you may come and go as you please. *Letting your homestay parent(s) know where you are going and when you will return*

is a common courtesy. While South Carolina cities are very safe compared to other US cities, they also have certain areas where students should be especially careful. It is a good idea not to wander around the city if you do not know where you are going. If you are not home when expected, your homestay parent(s) or host may worry that something has happened to you. This is especially true if you stay out all night and don't phone them to let them know that you are alright. Even if it is late, it is a good idea to phone home. Also, you should not bring home overnight guests without advance permission of your homestay parent(s).

You should ask what time most family members go to bed so you will not disturb them by staying awake until late at night. If you come home late at night, please be quiet and lock the door after you enter.

For everyone's safety and security, it is very important that you have your homestay parent show you how to turn the key to lock the doors. It is important to always remember to lock the windows in your bedroom when leaving the house. These are simply normal security procedures and do not mean that your homestay is located in an unsafe area.

Please do not play music loudly. Use headphones if you wish to play your music loudly.

Please discuss with your homestay family the times when the television in the living room may be turned on and when it should be turned off at night.

Do not bring members of the opposite sex into your bedroom. This would make your homestay parent very uncomfortable.

Abusive behavior (profanity, disrespect, damage to household items) toward the host causing them to be upset or causing extra unnecessary expenses *may be* reason to end your homestay and you will have to move out without refund.

Usually your homestay parent will give you a tour of their home and talk with you about the household rules. If you ever have any questions, please ask! If you feel too shy or don't know how to ask your questions, please speak with the Agape Homestay Coordinator.

Cleanliness

Americans place great importance on cleanliness; they bathe everyday, use deodorant after bathing and wear clean clothes everyday. They also brush their teeth at least twice each day after eating. Please know that body odor and bad breath are very offensive to most people. Personal toiletries such as shampoo, soap, deodorants, toothpaste, facial tissue and feminine hygiene products are not provided in your homestay. It is your responsibility to purchase and use these items.

Neatness

Even though you are a paying guest in an American home, each member of the household typically has his/her own responsibilities. **Your responsibilities include keeping your bedroom neat and clean.** *You should ask the family where the vacuum and other cleaning materials are kept and how to use them to keep your room clean.* It is also a good idea to empty the waste can (trash basket) in your bedroom as well.

You should hang your clothing, make your bed and tidy up the bathroom after using it. This includes removing hair from the drain in the shower or bathtub and cleaning up water that has dripped on the floor. Please leave the bathroom as you would want it to be if you were the next person to use it. **Always clean up after yourself whether in the bathroom, bedroom or kitchen!** You should also ask your homestay parent(s) where you can hang your wet towels. You should not hang wet towels or clothing in the bedroom or on the furniture. This may cause damage! **Remember:** *Your host family will not be your maids or servants.*

Laundry (Washing/Drying/Ironing Clothes)

The washing/drying procedure may be different in each homestay. Most host families or hosts have washing machines in their homes. Homestay families or hosts in condominiums or apartments may have a separate community laundry room with coin-operated machines. You should buy your own laundry detergent to use and ask the advice of your homestay parents or host as to how much to use when you wash.

Some homestay parents may offer to wash your clothes with those of the family; however, if you want to wash your clothes you should discuss this with your homestay parent(s). You should ask the location of the washing machine and how you can do your own laundry and how often it is permitted. Usually twice weekly is customary depending upon the members in the family and if there are small children. Generally speaking, it is your responsibility to wash and dry your own personal laundry.

If you need to iron clothing, please ask your homestay parent or host how you can do this. You **must not leave a hot iron unattended** (especially with small children in the home), and you must not leave it in the wrong place where it may burn and cause damage (to carpet, furniture, clothing, etc.).

Household Duties (Chores)

You may be asked to help set the meal table with plates and utensils (knives, forks, spoons) and/or help to clear the table after the meals and perhaps help to wash the dishes. **You may also be asked to help with minor chores** (small things to do) in the home. *Don't think of this as work.* Make a chore a learning experience and/or a time for conversation.

We don't want any of our students in homestay to be maids or servants. We only want you to know that it may be expected, as a temporary member of the family, that you help with household chores that are shared among the family members. Typically, traditional American families do not have maids or servants.

Smoking

You indicated in your homestay placement information whether you smoke or not. If you smoke but are assigned to a non-smoking household, you will not be permitted to smoke inside the home. Ask where you may smoke. You may be told that you may smoke outside (perhaps on their porch or in their yard) and you must not throw cigarette butts in the yard. *Please extinguish them well and put them in a garbage can. Your host family or host will not want to see cigarette butts, which is litter, in their yard.* Be aware that the city imposes fines for littering. Please do not try to smoke in your bedroom and blow smoke out the window. This doesn't work! It can also lead to an uncomfortable situation in your homestay when you do not follow the smoking rules. You should receive instructions about your ability to smoke before you arrive to your homestay. Remember most Americans are very aware of the health dangers of cigarette smoking and many have quit the habit. At home and in public it is always best to ask if anyone objects if you smoke around him or her.

Alcohol

Laws governing the drinking and buying of alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, liquor) in the US are very strict with no exceptions. You must be over the age of 21 in the state of South Carolina to drink and buy alcohol. Do not be upset if your host prefers you not bring alcohol into the home. NEVER drink alcohol before or while driving.

Illegal Drugs

Illegal drugs (marijuana, cocaine, hallucinogens, illegal prescription drugs, etc.) are not tolerated in homestays. If you are discovered using drugs while living in your homestay, you will be asked to leave the homestay with no refund of fees. If you are arrested for possessing or consuming drugs, you may go to jail and/or be deported.

Weekend Trips

If you will be away for any weekends, please inform your host that you will be away. You will not receive a refund for any nights that you are away, because your room is being held just for you.

Family Activities

Your host family will invite you to participate in family outings or activities. We assume you will want to interact with your homestay in this way to improve your English skills. If you cannot participate, please tell your host one day or two days in advance and **thank them for inviting you**. At all times be considerate of their plans and try to join them when possible. This is one of the main reasons why you are part of the homestay program.

It is appropriate to offer (and, at times, expected) to pay your own way to movies, or other family activities where there is a charge or fee involved.

Pets

Household pets (dogs, cats, birds) in American homes are very commonplace while the same may not be true in your country. Many families value their pets as lesser members and, over time, become very attached to their pets and are very sad when they die. If you are uncomfortable with pets in the home to which you have been assigned, please speak with the homestay coordinator.

Utilities (water, electricity, heat, air conditioning)

Water

As a member of your homestay family, you have a responsibility to help the family keep their utility expenses low. During some times of the year (especially summer), there are water shortages, and as a result, you may be asked to limit your showers and keep them short. Please do not be offended if your host parent(s) or host reminds you if you use too much water. In addition, there may be other members of the household who want to use the shower, so be sure to limit your showers so they, too, will have hot water.

Plumbing & Toilets

Please do not put excess toilet paper or sanitary napkins/tampons or other objects down the toilet. This may result in a plumbing blockage and can be very expensive for the homestay parent or host to repair. If this occurs, it may be necessary for you to pay for damage if it is determined that the blockage is your fault.

Electricity

Please do not waste electricity. If you are studying and need to use the lights in your room, of course your homestay parent(s) or host will not mind. But if you leave your bedroom lights on all night while you are sleeping, this is a waste of electricity. If you don't like to sleep in the dark, ask your homestay parent if there is a nightlight available for you to use. If not, you may have to buy one; these are inexpensive. Please remember to turn off lights after you leave rooms.

Air Conditioning and Heating

Please do not attempt to operate the air conditioner or heating system. If you are too hot or cold, tell your host. Do not keep your windows open without the permission of your homestay parent or host. This may waste heat or air conditioning.

Telephone Usage

The use of the telephone in your homestay is a privilege that you should not abuse. You should ask the homestay parent when you may use the telephone. Please keep your telephone calls brief. If a family member needs to use the telephone, please 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 bought at local stores.

900 or 976 area calls that you may see advertised on television are very expensive phone calls. You must not call these 900 numbers! Tell your homestay parent(s) or host about any 900 or long distance phone calls. You are not asked for telephone deposit money when you begin living in your homestay. However, if you make long distance calls without the permission of your homestay parent(s), and these calls are charged to the home phone, you may be asked to move out of your homestay and pay an amount that will cover the cost of these phone calls. Please be considerate to your homestay family members about the use of the telephone and costs of telephone calls.

Since there are time differences between the US and your country, you must tell your family and friends back home **not** to telephone you late at night when your homestay family is sleeping unless there is an emergency that cannot wait until morning. Your incoming telephone calls should not awaken and disturb your homestay family members.

Homestay Questions & Answers

Payment of Homestay Fees

All homestay fees should be paid to the Agape office. New homestay students should pay all homestay fees by wire transfer/Western Union before their arrival in Columbia to enter their homestay.

The Homestay Coordinator will pay your homestay family. Students, please do *not* pay any money directly to your host family.

During the first week of the session, the Homestay Coordinator will contact you to be sure that you are happy in your assigned homestay. Please be honest with the Homestay Coordinator. Your opinion is very important!

How will I pay for continuing sessions in the homestay?

1. You will pay the Agape office before the end of the current session or during registration for the next session homestay.
2. If you have paid in your country for the future homestay session, you must confirm to the Agape Homestay Coordinator that you will remain in your homestay, and Agape will arrange for that money to go to your homestay family.

Can I change my homestay for the next session?

If there is a problem in the homestay that is determined to be the fault of the student, reassignment to another homestay will require an additional payment of a placement fee. If there is a problem in the homestay that is determined to be the fault of the homestay family, no additional placement fee will be due. Such requests to change homestays are considered on a case-by-case basis.

May I stay in my homestay for additional nights and how much will it cost?

If you wish to stay additional nights with your homestay family after your homestay ends and the homestay family agrees to accommodate you, there may be additional fees payable directly to the host family. **Your extra nights in the homestay must not displace any new student assigned to that homestay.** If a new student is arriving at the homestay on the Sunday before the session begins, she/he must be given your room; therefore, you may be asked to move to another room for your extra nights.

In order to avoid crowding in a home by students who must stay a few days longer due to their airline flight reservations, Agape encourages you to move to a hotel/motel.

Can I stay in the homestay after I stop my English studies at ESL?

No, your homestay is for Agape students only. When you stop your English studies at Agape, you must leave the homestay. You are not permitted to make special arrangements with your homestay family to remain in their home.

If you leave Agape for more than one session and wish to return to the homestay program, you will have to reapply for a homestay. You may not receive the one you had previously unless prior arrangements are made before you leave. If you wish to take an authorized vacation from Agape for one session (after completing at least four regular sessions of study), you may stay in your current homestay during your vacation session, but **only** if your host family consents and **only** if you intend to return to study at Agape the following session. In this case, you must prepay the homestay fee for one full additional session at the same time you pay the homestay fee for the vacation session. This prepaid amount will *not* be refundable if you fail to re-enroll after the vacation session. You should speak with the Homestay Coordinator and Agape Director if you wish to return to your same homestay or a different one during your vacation break.

What are Homestay Evaluation Forms?

At the end of each session, the Agape staff will give you a homestay evaluation form to complete and return to him/her. We ask you to fill out the evaluation form to tell us how you feel about the quality of your homestay. These forms are kept strictly confidential and can inform us of any problems you may be having in your homestay. Your comments are our primary source of information about your homestay and what you think about your homestay is important to us.

What do I do if I am unhappy or have problems in my homestay?

Talking with your friends at school about the homestay-related problem will not solve the problem. Please talk with the Homestay Coordinator or Agape Director if you have a homestay-related problem. We want your stay during your studies at Agape to be a happy one. We are here to assist you with your problems or questions. ***Your satisfaction in your homestay is very important to us.***