



## **Aspect Foundation Launches Exchange Student Bill of Rights**

### **Strengthening Safeguards for our Students**

Many good federal regulations exist to ensure the safety of foreign exchange students. Federal regulations work best if they are fully understood not only by staff and coordinators, but also by school personnel, natural parents, host parents, and, most importantly, by the students themselves.

Recent events have convinced us that every foreign exchange student needs to be better educated about all of their rights and responsibilities; the many people who are available to help them; and the attendant grievance processes for addressing their concerns. Other participants – hosts, coordinators, schools – also need to be fully apprised of an exchange student’s rights and responsibilities. While all of these things are articulated in various regulations, documents, and handbooks, and communicated in various ways at various events, we believe it will benefit all participants to review and sign one document that summarizes and explains the basic responsibilities and rights to which every student is entitled; and to be continually reminded and re-educated regarding students’ rights and responsibilities.

Therefore Aspect Foundation is introducing the **Exchange Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities** as a new central tenet of our program. This document sets forth each foreign exchange student’s 21 basic rights and responsibilities. The Bill of Rights and Responsibilities also includes a description of our grievance processes for students to voice their concerns without fear of being sent home. Students’ rights and responsibilities will be reviewed with and signed by all participants, including students, natural parents, host parents, and Aspect Foundation representatives.

Please see the next page for the full text of the **Exchange Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities**.



## **Aspect Foundation** **Exchange Student Bill of Rights & Responsibilities**

### **Welcome to the United States of America!**

As an Exchange Visitor on our academic and cultural exchange program, you have certain unalienable rights and responsibilities. You should become familiar with these 21 rights and responsibilities, and you must SPEAK UP if any of your rights are being violated. **You can voice your concerns about any of these rights, at any time, without fear of being sent home.** You will be contacted EVERY MONTH to review your rights and to ensure that you are safe and well.

### **PRE-ARRIVAL**

#### **#1: PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION**

**I have the right to a pre-departure orientation** before I leave my home country to help me prepare for my exchange experience. **I understand that my pre-departure orientation will include training on personal safety**, including how to SPEAK UP and take specific steps if I feel threatened or violated in any way.

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### **ARRIVAL & POST-ARRIVAL**

#### **#2: AIRPORT GREETING AT MY FINAL DESTINATION**

**I have the right to be met at the airport in my host community** (my final destination) by my host family and/or by an exchange program representative. I understand that if my flight is delayed, I have the responsibility to call my host family (not my natural family) and the exchange program to report my new arrival schedule.

#### **#3: WELCOME ORIENTATION**

**I have the right to a welcome orientation** within two weeks of the first day of school to help me prepare for my exchange experience. **I understand that my welcome orientation will include training on personal safety**, including how to SPEAK UP and take specific steps if I feel threatened or violated in any way. I also understand that my orientation will include information on:

- (1) Life and customs in the United States;
  - (2) Local community resources (e.g., public transportation, medical centers, schools, libraries, recreation centers, and banks), to the extent possible;
  - (3) Available health care, emergency assistance, and insurance coverage;
  - (4) A description of my exchange program;
  - (5) Rules that I am required to follow under my exchange program;
  - (6) Address of my exchange program and the name and telephone number of the responsible officer; and
  - (7) Address and telephone number of the Exchange Visitor Program Services of the Department of State and a copy of the Exchange Visitor Program brochure outlining the regulations relevant to the exchange visitors.
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## **HOST FAMILY PLACEMENT**

### **#4: HOST FAMILY SCREENING AND PLACEMENT**

**I have the right to be placed with a volunteer host family** that has been evaluated through a comprehensive screening process including (1) a detailed host family application including photos; (2) an in-home interview with all family members present; (3) a criminal background check of all adult family members; (4) a minimum of three reference checks; and (5) a host family orientation, prior to my arrival, that prepares my host family for their responsibilities as a host family and for their expectations of me as an exchange student. I understand that all of these steps are to be completed by a trained, independent exchange coordinator or employee who is not a relative of the host family.

### **#5: PERMANENT OR TEMPORARY HOST FAMILY PLACEMENT**

**I have the right to be placed with either a temporary or permanent host family** that has passed all the screening requirements. I understand that if I am placed with a temporary family, it may take six weeks to secure a permanent host family.

### **#6: SANITARY HOST HOME**

**I have the right to a sanitary host home environment.** I understand that most American families have pets, and busy family homes may be cluttered or messy, but not unsanitary. Unsanitary means very dirty, with insects, animal feces, rodents, or other potentially unhealthy things. I understand that I have the responsibility to help around the home and yard with chores, just like a real family member. I have the responsibility to notify Aspect Foundation if my host home environment becomes unsanitary.

### **#7: SAFE HOST HOME**

**I have the right to a safe home environment,** with smoke alarms in working order, proper fire exits, any fire arms safely locked and secured, and no adult residents who are convicted criminals or who have not been properly screened and background checked. I have the responsibility to notify Aspect Foundation if a new adult moves into my host home.

### **#8: BASIC NECESSITIES IN HOST HOME**

**I have the right to expect the basic necessities of living to be provided by my host family, including adequate food, water, heat and electricity.** I understand that personal expenses such as toiletries (shampoo, personal hygiene products, etc.), school supplies (paper, printer ink, notebooks, pens, etc.), meals outside the home (restaurants, fast food, pizza, etc.) and entertainment (movies, bowling, sports events, concerts, etc.) are my responsibility and may be at my own expense.

### **#9: BEDROOM AND PLACE TO STUDY IN HOST HOME**

**I have the right to my own bed and a place to study.** I understand that I may share a bedroom with a same-sex host sibling who is no more than 5 years younger or older than me.

### **#10: THREE MEALS PER DAY PROVIDED BY HOST FAMILY**

**I have the right to enough food for three meals per day – breakfast, lunch and dinner – provided by my host family.** I understand that my family will provide the groceries, and I will not be expected to buy food for the family. I understand that I may be required to “help myself” to some meals. I understand that if I choose to bring lunch from home, my host family will provide supplies for me to pack a lunch. I understand that if I choose to buy lunch at school, this may be at my own expense. I understand that I am not entitled to expect my family to buy special snacks or groceries for me, and that if I choose not to eat what the family provides, then I will need to purchase my own food at my own expense. I understand that, as a family member, I may be

required to help prepare meals and clean up after meals. I understand that, as an exchange student, it is nice if I offer to make a meal from my own country sometimes.

**#11: ADULT SUPERVISION BY MY HOST PARENT(S)**

**I have the right to expect adult supervision from my host parent(s).** I understand that my host parent(s) may require to know where I am at all times, who I am with, and whether adults are present. I understand that my host family may have strict rules and curfews. I understand that I have the responsibility to follow all the rules of my host family and to treat my host parent(s) and family members with respect.

**#12: FAMILY PARTICIPATION**

**I have the right and responsibility to participate as a full family member.** I understand that I may be expected to perform regular chores in the host home; however these chores should not interfere with my school attendance or academic obligations. I understand that I must follow the rules of my host family, including participating in host family activities. I understand that my host parents or exchange program may restrict my privileges, including but not limited to social activities, computer usage and cell phone privileges, if I do not fulfill my responsibilities as a family member.

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**HIGH SCHOOL PLACEMENT**

**#13: HIGH SCHOOL ENROLLMENT**

**I have the right to enrollment in an accredited high school in the USA,** confirmed in writing by a high school official, prior to departure from my home country. I have the right to be informed as to whether my school is a public or private high school.

**#14: SCHOOL ATTENDANCE & RESPONSIBILITIES**

**I have the right and responsibility to attend school regularly, to complete my homework, and to maintain a C or better in each class.** I understand that my host parents or exchange program may restrict my privileges, including but not limited to social activities, computer usage and cell phone privileges, if I do not fulfill my school obligations.

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**LOCAL SUPPORT**

**#15: LOCAL COORDINATOR SUPERVISION & SUPPORT**

**I have the right to be supervised and supported by a local coordinator** who lives within 120 miles of my host home; is trained and available to assist me with questions, concerns and problems during my stay; and is expected to return my calls within 24 hours. I have the responsibility to contact my Regional Manager if my coordinator is not available to help me for any reason.

**#16: LOCAL COORDINATOR NOT RELATED TO HOST FAMILY**

**I have the right to be supervised and supported by an independent local coordinator who is not also serving as my host family and is not related to my host family.** If my host parent works for my exchange program, I have the right to be assigned a separate local coordinator to serve as my supervisor, to help me with questions and problems.

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## MONTHLY CONTACT

### **#17: MONTHLY CONTACT**

**I have the right to expect that a representative of my exchange program will contact me once per month, at minimum, to check on my progress with my host family and school, and to offer me guidance and assistance as needed.**

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## WHO TO CONTACT FOR HELP

### **#18: TELEPHONE NUMBERS & EMAIL ADDRESSES TO CONTACT FOR HELP**

**I have the right to have toll-free phone numbers and email addresses of my local coordinator's supervisors, so that I can call them for help and guidance if I cannot reach my local coordinator or if I believe my local coordinator is not helping me.**

**I have the right to a 24 hour toll-free emergency telephone number which I can call at any time if I have an emergency or believe I am in danger.**

**I have the right to call or email the US Department of State if I believe my exchange program staff is not helping me, or if I believe my exchange student rights have been violated.**

### **#19: PEOPLE TO CONTACT FOR HELP**

**I understand that many people are here to help me. I understand that I have the responsibility to call the following people if I need help: #1 my coordinator; #2 my manager; #3 my national advisor; and #4 the Aspect national office. If I believe my exchange program staff is not helping me, I understand that I have the right to tell another trusted adult or to contact the US State Department.**

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## PERSONAL MONEY MANAGEMENT

### **#20: PERSONAL MONEY MANAGEMENT**

**I have the right and responsibility to manage my own money as provided by my natural parents or scholarship program. I understand that I am never to borrow money from my host family. I also understand that I am never to loan money to my host family. I also understand that my natural family is not supposed to send money to my host family. I understand that I am never to share a bank account with my host family or to give anyone my secret PIN number for my bank card or credit card.**

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## LAWS, RULES AND GUIDELINES

### **#21: RESPECTING AND FOLLOWING LAWS, RULES AND GUIDELINES**

**I understand that along with rights come the responsibility to abide by all federal, state and local laws; to respect and follow the rules of my host family; to respect and follow the rules of my high school; and to respect and follow the rules and guidelines of my exchange program. In the event that I fail to follow laws, rules or guidelines, I have the responsibility to participate in appropriate disciplinary procedures as warranted by my host family, high school, exchange program, and/or law enforcement. I understand that disciplinary procedures may include restriction of privileges such as cell phone use, computer use, approved travel, social activities, and other privileges. I have the right to a thorough review process**

**accompanying any disciplinary actions whether for minor infractions or for serious violations which may result in dismissal from the exchange program. I have the right to have disciplinary procedures explained to me verbally and in writing, in language that I can fully understand.**

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### **STUDENT GRIEVANCE PROCESS\*\***

Exchange students are brave and daring young ambassadors, who courageously fly miles from family and friends to learn a new way of life. Students who believe they have had their rights violated according to the specifications in the "Exchange Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities" should utilize the following process to resolve that grievance.

In the governance of an exchange program, there is a "chain of command." Grievances should be first discussed with the person with whom you have a problem (host family member, other student, etc.). If the grievance is unresolved, you should proceed up the chain of command.

- First, contact your local coordinator. Your local coordinator will try to help you resolve the situation.
- If the situation is unresolved, call your area manager. Your manager will talk to all parties involved in an effort to help you resolve the problem.
- If your manager cannot resolve the problem, call your National Advisor. Your advisor will talk to everyone involved and help to manage the problem until the grievance has been satisfactorily settled.

Any student who feels aggrieved may consult with the National Advisor at any time concerning the process and the procedures. If you simply do not feel comfortable talking to your coordinator or your manager, you may call your advisor at any time. Any student who feels that the exchange program grievance process is not helping to resolve the problem may contact the Executive Director to file a complaint concerning the staff, process and procedures. Any student who feels that the exchange program personnel are not helping them can contact the US Department of State to file a complaint concerning the exchange program.

**\*\*Please note:** if you feel un-safe, in danger, or threatened at any time, you should immediately tell a trusted adult – such as your coordinator, the school guidance counselor, the school nurse, a teacher, your principal, or a police officer.

### **HOST FAMILY GRIEVANCE PROCESS**

Host families are America's most generous volunteers. They give of themselves every day, from breakfast to bedtime. Host families have the right to expect that an exchange student will behave as a real member of the family – participating in family activities, interacting and talking with family members, following family rules, and treating family members with respect.

Host family grievances should be first discussed with the student. If the grievance is unresolved, you should proceed up the chain of command. In the governance of an exchange program, there is a system for managing issues that may arise – adjustment problems, behavioral issues, academic issues – during the exchange experience.

- First, contact your local coordinator. Your local coordinator will try to help you resolve the situation. Your local coordinator may ask for a "family meeting" to help resolve the situation.
- If the situation is unresolved, call your area manager. Your manager will talk to all parties involved in an effort to help you resolve the problem. Your manager may recommend specific steps and agreements to be followed by the student and family.

- If your manager cannot resolve the problem, call your National Advisor. Your advisor will talk to everyone involved and help to manage the problem until the grievance has been satisfactorily settled.

Any host parent who feels aggrieved may consult with the National Advisor at any time concerning the process and the procedures. If you simply do not feel comfortable talking to your coordinator or your manager, you may call your advisor at any time. Any host parent who feels that the exchange program grievance process is not helping to resolve the problem may contact the Executive Director to file a complaint concerning the staff, process and procedures. Any host parent who feels that the exchange program personnel is not helping them can contact the US Department of State to file a complaint concerning the exchange program.

### **NATURAL PARENT GRIEVANCE PROCESS**

Natural parents give their child the most precious gift of all – not a five star vacation, but the opportunity to learn a new way of life and to become a more mature and thoughtful young adult. Natural parents should encourage their child to turn to the host family for help whenever it is needed. It is important that natural parents allow their child to become a member of their host family and to rely on the host parents for guidance and support. If there is a problem with the host family, natural parents should encourage their child to proceed up the exchange program’s “chain of command”, beginning with contacting the local coordinator. Natural parents themselves who have grievances or concerns should follow the communication protocol established by the office in their own country.

*We welcome your feedback on the Exchange Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.*

*Please email us at [info@aspectfoundation.org](mailto:info@aspectfoundation.org).*

*Please be sure to include your name and telephone number.*

*Thank you for your support of cultural exchange.*