

Cultural Considerations

Relative Values

Living in another country gives you an opportunity to learn what is different from what you know. As a Youth Exchange student, you'll discover many differences between the values and norms in your home and host countries, from different ways of dressing to differences in relationships between males and females.

In your home or host country . . .

- Do young people address adults by their first names or last names?
- How do family members greet one another? What are the customary greetings among friends? schoolmates? business associates? men? women?
- How common is kissing or hugging among nonfamily members? holding hands?
- Is the style of dress modest? casual? formal?
- What gestures are considered obscene, offensive, or rude?
- How close do people usually stand to one another when talking?

Behaviors that are considered rude in some places may be considered normal or even complimentary in other places. For instance:

- Whistling
- Pointing
- Winking
- Keeping your hands in your pockets while talking
- Making direct eye contact
- Chewing gum
- Slurping while eating soup
- Crossing your legs while sitting
- Gesturing with your hands while speaking

Use your First Night Questions to explore some of these cultural differences so you will understand how to behave and what to do in different situations. Be observant. Watch people you respect and see how they act in various circumstances. Ask questions of your host parents and Rotary counselor to clarify appropriate behavior. Be prepared to make mistakes. We all do. Ask your family, counselors and friends to tell you when you do or say something inappropriate so they can help you adjust your behavior and meet expectations. And be prepared to laugh at yourself; a sense of humor is always an important asset!

Helpful website: <http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>