



SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HOMESTAYS: A GUIDE FOR ADVISORS



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SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HOMESTAYS: A GUIDE FOR ADVISORS

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Introduction

The four documents submitted as examples for Host Families of Learners with Disabilities were designed for a variety of uses. We intentionally provided broad descriptions and recommendations as we know each learner with a disability is unique and will have their own set of strengths, challenges, supports, and needs. We would prefer to err on being too broad than overgeneralizing or stereotyping any one disability or person with a disability.

The Introduction document is meant to be a greeting and thank you to host families. We wanted to give them some general information about learners with disabilities participating in host family stays abroad. Our intent was to re-assure the family of the learners' abilities to participate and to encourage them to ask questions and seek more information from their study abroad program contact.

The documents on Physical Disabilities, Sensory Disabilities, and Mental Health Conditions are meant to introduce the disability and some general information as well as encourage further discussion with the learner with the disability and the program personnel. We wanted to focus on integration into the home and family, rather than academics or the program activities.

We also incorporated some formatting that applies Readability strategies for access to information. Our hope is that others will use these documents as guides to develop other materials for their programs and host families, or to adapt them for their own programs.



Diversity Abroad's Guide to Hosting A Student with a Disability

Thank you for agreeing to share your home with a student, specifically a student with a disability. We have selected you and your family as a host for this student as we are confident that you can provide a safe and supportive environment.

The student you are hosting has met all the requirements for participation in this study abroad program. However, they may demonstrate some differences in how they function within your home. Although the student is participating in an educational program, their disability may affect other areas of daily life, including but not limited to: communication, relationships, and movement. This should not present any major inconveniences for you, but some general information might be useful.

Language can be very important in how comfortable people are in their shared activities and establishing their identity(ies). It is encouraged that students and host families reach out to each other. If a member of the host family is unsure of how to talk about a student's disability, ask the student how they communicate their disability and their preferences for discussion.

Once again, thank you for opening your home to this student. We also want to remind you that the student in your home can communicate and advocate what and how their needs can be met. Together you and the student can create a positive and rewarding relationship.

This guide provides general tips, information, and resources to assist you in hosting a student with a Physical, Sensory, and/or Mental Health disability. Explore not only information on what a student's potential disability requires, but how to begin a dialogue about how a student's disability has the potential to impact the host family experience. For more information, we recommend reaching out to the study abroad provider for more student specific resources.

General Tips and Resources

A student with a disability may require **assistive devices**, a **service animal** or **personal assistant services** to assist with anxiety, mobility, reach, domestic tasks, communication, personal care and/or transportation. An official from the study abroad program can meet with you, your family and the student to explain the arrangements for the care of the service animal, or housing for the personal assistant.

- **Assistive Devices** (i.e. hearing aid, assistive software, a magnification device, etc.):
 - » Is the responsibility of students to provide and maintain
 - » Should accompany students from the US and not require purchases abroad

- **Service Animals** (i.e. guide animal, hearing animal, assistance animal, emotional support animal, etc.):
 - » Must meet the legal requirements for entry into the host country
 - » Received training on how to navigate and provide services in a variety of environments
- **Personal Assistant** (i.e. in-home assistant, medical assistant, interpreter, occupational assistant, etc.):
 - » Has been trained to provide specific services
 - » Will not interfere with your authority
 - » Should have all arrangements made prior to arrival of the student in your home

If a student with a disability requires **prescribed medication**, the student is expected to bring medicine, necessary supplies and appropriate documentation. An official from the study abroad program can meet with you, your family and the student to explain medication requirements for administration or storage. For example, a student with a disability may require:

- A place to store medication/supplies that is safe, cold, dry, out of reach of children, accessible, and/or private
- A secure trash depository for medical waste

The following questions might help you to start a conversation with the student about their disability. You might also schedule a meeting between your family, the student, and the program organizer to review some of these topics.

- How does your disability impact your daily life?
- How can we create a safe and open environment?
- What are some helpful tips we should know to help us support you?
- Can you provide us with information regarding any emergency plans you and/or your program have in place?
- Has the program provided you with information regarding a medical professional in the community? Can you share that information with us?
- Are you interested in engaging with local support groups?

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

A **physical disability** is a condition that affects mobility, strength, stamina, coordination, movement, and/or dexterity. This disability can be acute or chronic in nature. Be assured that a student's disability or health condition is not contagious.

Students with disabilities are still establishing their identity, building relationships, and finding their place in the world. This study abroad experience and homestay can be a major step towards independence and self-actualization. A student's participation in this study abroad program indicates a level of autonomy and self-care that minimizes dependence on others.

In general, this student may:

- Require more time to complete physical tasks including moving from place to place, eating a meal, etc.
- Have balance difficulties walking or moving on uneven surfaces, slippery / wet surfaces, or cluttered surfaces
- Tire quickly
- Have difficulty carrying items
- Find it tiring or difficult to maneuver stairs, especially if there is no handrail
- Need assistance with activities that require strength, such as opening heavy doors, carrying luggage or other heavy items, etc.
- Experience chronic pain or discomfort, requiring private space and time to rest
- Require assistance reaching an object beyond arm's length

The student may require a daily routine or lifestyle that accounts for their physical limitations.

When developing a routine during their study abroad program, students may:

- Establish something similar to their routine at home/ home institution
- Schedule activities at times when they normally have more energy
- Require logistical planning from the home to various points of interest (i.e. school, grocery store, church, etc.)

The student may require a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, brace, cane, etc. When a student uses a wheelchair, please try to avoid:

- Pushing, leaning on or holding onto the wheelchair while it is occupied
- Leaning down to talk to the student. For long conversations, pull up a chair to be at the student's eye level.

The student may require special food, food preparation, or food supplements. Students with dietary restrictions should:

- Acquire their own food supplements
- Avoid eating any foods which might cause a physical reaction
- Will assist or provide guidance in food preparation.

Things you might find helpful:

- Before offering assistance, ask the student if it is needed or desired.
- Don't try lifting or carrying the student unless you have a good understanding of safe lifting techniques to protect yourself.
- Be patient.

We strongly suggest researching your student's disability in the context of your country and culture. Resources may help with vocabulary, identify local organizations/support groups, or provide more culturally specific information regarding the disability that could be useful during the student's stay.

The following are some links that might help you understand the U.S. perspective on physical disabilities:

[Tips for Interactions with Wheelchair Users](#)

[10 Tips to Prepare for the Journey](#)

[15 Ways to Accommodate Exchange Participants with Chronic Health Conditions](#)

[U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Population Affairs](#)

SENSORY DISABILITIES

A **sensory disability** is a disability of the **senses** (e.g. sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste). This disability can be acute or chronic in nature. Be assured that a student's disability or health condition is not contagious.

Students with disabilities, are still establishing their identity, building relationships, and finding their place in the world. This study abroad experience and homestay can be a major step towards these independence and self-actualization. A student's participation in this study abroad program indicates a level of autonomy and self-care that minimizes dependence on others.

In general, a student with a sensory disability may:

- Use terminology different from those without a sensory disability
- Be reluctant to talk about their disability
- Require a service animal or assistive device to accommodate for the affected sense
- Request vivid engagement of other senses to understand environment
- Need additional time to acclimate to surroundings
- Be expected to clean up after themselves
- Contribute to household activities such as cooking/washing dishes
- Perform personal hygiene tasks

The student with a **vision impairment** may primarily require assistance with navigation and mobility in host family. These students may require accommodations/assistance in:

- Understanding the physical layout of your home
- Learning the route from your home to local transportation, shops, etc.
- Living in a home free of clutter
- Living in a home where communal items (i.e. plates, cups, wastebasket, etc.) are in set and consistent location.
- First recognizing people by voice. The student may not always hear others enter/leave a room. Try to always identify yourself in conversation and vocalize movements. e.g. "I'm going into the kitchen now." When talking with others, please call them by name so the student knows who you are talking to.

- Getting around new locations
 - » Feel free to offer your arm as guidance, but do not reach out and grab them unless their safety is at risk.
- Participating in conversations about visual items, such as art, scenery, clothing, etc.
 - » Start by briefly describe the items you are discussing
- Obtaining detailed navigation language as opposed to vague statements of “there” or “here”

The student with a **hearing impairment** may require assistance regarding safety and communication within the home. These students may require assistance in:

- Engaging in conversations when people do not make eye contact or speak in a clear voice
- Understanding content of conversation because of accented speech or local dialects or other difficulty
- Participating in group discussions or activities with multiple speakers at once or plethora of background noise
- Responding to smoke or fire alarms

We strongly suggest researching your student’s disability in the context of your country and culture. Resources may help with vocabulary, identify local organizations/support groups, or provide more culturally specific information regarding the disability that could be useful during the student’s stay.

The following are some links that might help you understand the U.S. perspective on sensory disabilities:

[Blind and Low Vision Tips for Going Abroad](#)

[Do’s and Don’ts When Interacting with a Person Who Is Blind](#)

[Ten Tips to Help You Communicate with a Person with Sight Loss](#)

[Tips for Communicating with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals](#)

MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

A **mental health condition** is a circumstance that affects the mind and also has the potential to impact the body. This disability can be acute or chronic in nature. Be assured that a student's disability or health condition is not contagious.

Students with disabilities, are still establishing their identity, building relationships, and finding their place in the world. This study abroad experience and homestay can be a major step towards these independence and self actualization. A student's participation in this study abroad program indicates a level of autonomy and self-care that minimizes dependence on others.

There are many ways to describe one's mental health condition. If you are unsure about the language, ask the student about his/her preference. As a host family, helping someone with a mental disorder may be as simple as showing acceptance, understanding and willingness to support.

In general, students with mental health conditions may:

- Be unfairly accused of being devious and/or violent
- Obtain medication and/or therapy to address their condition
- Keep more to themselves
- Receive therapeutic services from someone regarding their concerns
- Require a strict routine to manage symptoms
- May need additional support to navigate unfamiliar situations
- Be more likely to be the victim of a violent crime than the general public

Be assured, the student you are hosting has demonstrated a positive university record. Students living with a mental health disorder develop coping mechanisms that allow them to be a productive, integrated member of society. These coping mechanisms are universal and portable when studying abroad. In fact, the student may be uniquely equipped to face challenges that may arise while abroad. Students with mental health conditions may thrive in the new environment without showing any noticeable symptoms of their disability.

We strongly suggest researching your student's disability in the context of your country and culture. Resources may help with vocabulary, identify local organizations/support groups, or provide more culturally specific information regarding the disability that could be useful during the student's stay.

The following are some links that might help you understand the U.S. perspective on mental health conditions:

[Make It OK](#)

[Seize the Awkward](#)

[Mental Health.gov](#)

[Successful Study Abroad with a Mental Health Condition](#)

[U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Population Affairs](#)

[Her Story: Studying Abroad With A Mental Illness](#)

[Mental Health Myths and Facts](#)

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