



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' HOMESTAY HANDBOOK



WELCOME TO YOUR NEW HOMESTAY!

Keeping these simple rules of respect will help make your homestay experience a happy one.

1. **Be part of the family**- enjoy spending time with your host parents, brothers and sisters. Respect them and be friendly. They will treat you the same way.
2. **Respect the house as a home**- it is **not** a hotel. Respect the property and rules of your family. Keep it clean and tidy. Don't use too much hot water or electricity.
3. **Keep your homestay parents in the loop**- Always tell your family (before you go!) where you are going and if you will be late home for any reason.

Culture Shock

You will notice some differences in the way Kiwi families behave towards each other and towards you. Please don't be offended. Try to learn their ways and behave the same way they do while you're in their home.

When you leave your own culture and go to another you may experience a wide range of feelings and reactions. You may feel:

- Confused and disorientated
- Nervous, tired and have trouble sleeping
- Frustrated and angry towards people in this new country
- Dependent on others from your home country who also live in this new place



Experiencing some or all of these feelings is known as culture shock. The food will be different, people will look, act and speak differently. Your family and friends are far away. You may have difficulty telling people in English how you feel.

This can often make you confused and unsure and you may wonder if you made the right decision to study overseas. This is not easy to deal with, but remember you are not alone.

MAKING FRIENDS:

New Zealanders are very friendly. They like to joke and smile, and usually enjoy meeting new people. It's important to meet and get to know New Zealanders. Try to get out and meet lots of people. Once you've formed one friendship it will be easier to make others.



Try to be relaxed and open, even if you're worried about making mistakes with your English. Some people may laugh at your attempts but they do not mean to offend and will be impressed that you're trying.

Some questions are not suitable to ask people in New Zealand unless you know the person very well e.g. don't ask a woman her age (especially older women), don't ask people how much money they earn or how much they paid for their house.

Punctuality

In New Zealand you are expected to be punctual or 'on time'. If you have to meet someone at 3.00pm you should be there at 3.00pm. If you're going to be late you should phone to explain.

'Thank you'

Thank you is a phrase often used in New Zealand – even for small favours it's polite to say thank you. It is normal for people to say thank you to the bus driver when they get off the bus.

Personal Space

New Zealanders like a large 'personal space', so when talking with someone it is a good idea to stand a few feet away from that person. Intensive eye contact or standing too close can be viewed as an invasion of 'personal space'. If you notice someone backing away from you, this could be the reason.

Discrimination

New Zealanders do not discriminate – it's against our law. All people are equal. This means that women and men are treated equally and women must be given the same respect as men. Gay or straight, Christian or other religion, old or young, it also does not matter what country a person comes from; they will be treated as an equal and you should treat them as equal.

Noise

In most places it is an offence to make loud noises that are annoying to other people, even if you make the noise in your own home. It is illegal to make loud noises after 11.00pm and before 7.00am, such as mowing your lawns, using a chainsaw, playing loud music etc.

AT HOME:

Family Disagreements:

It is normal for New Zealanders to show how they feel. If they are not happy or disagree with something they usually tell the other person at the time. We are often direct when we are angry and we think it is okay to express anger. Don't be embarrassed if this happens. If you have a problem, please speak up and don't keep it to yourself. Kiwis might be upset if you keep secrets from them.



Showing Affection

Most Kiwis also show when they are happy. Kiwi families kiss and cuddle very freely. They often show affection in public and around the home. Again, don't be embarrassed. Your homestay brothers and sister may make jokes about you, or tease you. This is just their way of saying that you are like a real sister to them.

Eye Contact:

It is polite to look at someone when you talk to them. You should put your cell-phone away when you are talking with your homestay family or eating a meal.

Shoes and Feet:

Please take off your shoes when you enter your homestay's house, and don't put your feet on the coffee table or couches. It is ok to walk around inside the house in your bare feet.

Pets

Many New Zealand families have pets such as dogs or cats. These animals are friendly and shouldn't hurt you if you are friendly to them. They are usually loved and treated well. Do not be surprised to find them inside the house and for them to be treated like a member of the family. They may often sleep on your homestay parents' bed in some houses.

Tell your homestay family if you have any allergies.





BEDROOM:

Please feel free to study in your bedroom but do not spend all your time there. Try to spend time with your homestay family and talk to them about different things every day. You may have many things to share and talking with your homestay family will help to improve your English.

Members of your homestay family will sometime knock on your bedroom door but some (small children) may walk into your room without knocking. This is because they are treating you as their big sister! But, if this really bothers you, speak to your homestay parents about it.

Usually, there are no locks on bedroom doors in New Zealand. If a door is closed, please knock before you go into the room.

The bed may be different from one in your country. We sleep between a top and bottom sheet which we wash each week. Ask your homestay family to show you how to make your bed if you are unsure.

Keep your room tidy and clean. Your homestay parents may have rules about no food in the bedroom. Ask them to tell you exactly how to keep your room tidy and clean.

New Zealand families like to open our bedrooms and let sunshine and fresh air in. We pull back the curtains and sometimes open the windows during the day. Please ask your homestay parent if your bedroom windows should be open or closed.

BED TIME: Most New Zealand young children go to bed from 7.00pm onwards, depending on their age. Most high school students go to bed between 10.00 and 11.00pm but please check with your homestay parents when your light must be off, and your cell-phone put away. You should say 'Goodnight' to your homestay parents before you go to bed.

If you stay up late at night often and this makes you sleepy during the school day, your school might ask your homestay parent to turn off the house wi-fi at bedtime.



MEALTIMES AND EATING:

New Zealand food can be very heavy and starchy. We often have a small lunch and then a large dinner, early, at around 6.00pm. It is okay to say “No, thank you.” to food you do not like. Your family will not care, but you should try new foods at least once. It is part of your New Zealand experience.

If you miss your usual food very much, you may want to help choose the meal and help your homestay family with cooking it. Talk to your homestay parents about this.

Tell your homestay family a few days before if you plan to eat a meal at a friend’s house, or outside the family home. They need time to plan if they should cook for you or not.

New Zealand families usually eat their meals together. Start your meal when the family begins to eat. It is a good idea to say “Thank you” to the person who cooked the food, and tell them it is delicious if you liked the food. They will really appreciate it.

Don’t use your cell-phone while you are at the dinner table, because your homestay family will think this is very rude.

Ask someone to pass the food on the table to you if it is too far away. Don’t reach across the table.

If your hosts asks you if you would like a ‘second helping’ or ‘seconds’ (more to eat), accept if you would like more, but if you've had enough, just say ‘no thank you’. Your hosts will not think this is impolite.

You should stay at the table until everyone has finished eating.

Homestay families will think of you as part of the family, and they may ask you to help:

- Set the table.
- Bring food to the table.
- Clear the table after the meal.
- Pack / unpack the dishwasher.



LUNCHES AND WEEKENDS:

Most New Zealand families have a fruit bowl in the kitchen that you can take fruit from to eat when you like.

Talk to your family about what food you can eat after school and on the weekends. Talk to your homestay parents about what food you will eat for school lunches. Tell them what you like and what you don’t like.

If you don’t tell them that you don’t like something- they will keep giving it to you!



HELPING AROUND THE HOME:

In New Zealand it is usual for **EVERYONE** to help with the household chores.

These include:

- Opening and closing the curtains / windows.
- Helping to prepare meals.
- Clearing the table after a meal.
- Washing / drying dishes or packing / unpacking the dishwasher.
- Folding your own clean clothes.
- Keeping your own room clean and tidy.
- Keeping the bathroom clean and tidy after you use it.



USING THE BATHROOM: In most New Zealand homes the bathroom is very busy in the mornings. Try to be as quick as you can.

Ask your family what time is best for you take a shower or bath.



When you take a shower, pull the curtain or close the shower door and put a bath mat on the floor, to keep the bathroom floor dry. Only spend 5-10 minutes in the shower. Don't use too much hot water, because hot water is very expensive in New Zealand. Plus there is a limited supply of hot water for the whole family.

Check with your homestay parent where you should put your wet towels, and if you need to wipe the mirror or open the windows after your shower.

LAUNDRY: Your homestay parents will tell you where to put your dirty clothes. They will wash and dry your clothes. You might need to help fold them and put them back in your room.



KEEPING WARM:

Electricity is expensive in New Zealand because we have no nuclear energy. New Zealand houses are also usually much bigger and colder than those in your country. Most Kiwi families keep their living area heated and keep the door closed so the heat stays in. Most Kiwis prefer to wear warm clothes rather than turn on a heater.

You need to have warm clothes. When you are cold, try to do it the Kiwi way- put on a warm jersey, trousers and socks before you ask your homestay parents to turn up the heating.

It is important to stay warm; New Zealand winters can be very cold and you don't want to get sick.



Electric Blankets:



Many families use an electric blanket to warm the bed. Ask your homestay parent if you are allowed to use one. Do not sleep with the blanket turned on- **make sure it is turned off before you go to bed and during the day or it may cause a fire.** Families may also have hot water bottles if they do not use electric blankets.



Using Heaters:



Many New Zealand houses have heat-pumps instead of bedroom heaters. If you have a bedroom heater, do not leave it turned on for long periods of time. Always check with your homestay parents before you turn on the heaters.

If you use too much electricity or hot water, your homestay may ask you to pay some money to cover the extra cost. If this is the case, they should show you their electricity bills which should clearly show the increase you have used.

Check with your homestay parents what time is **'Lights Out'**, which means that your bedroom light, all computers, laptops and cellphones must be turned off.



Telephone calls:

It is important to talk to your family about using the family phone.

Do not speak too long on the phone. Limit yourself to about 20 minutes.

Most New Zealand people do not like to be phoned before 9am, at dinner time, or after 9pm.

It is free to call telephone numbers within Christchurch. Other cities within New Zealand cost money, as do overseas calls. You must pay for your own national and international toll calls and cellphone use. You can use pre-paid 0800 telephone cards, which you can buy from most local dairies. Ask if the card can be used to call your home country because some cards don't call all places around the world.

Internet:



Not all New Zealand households have unlimited internet access.

This is not a requirement. It is a luxury provided by the homestay family.

Internet facilities are available at Christchurch Girls' High School in the library for all students to use during interval and lunchtime.

If the family allows you to use their internet when you first move in to the homestay, you should agree with your homestay family about how much you will pay them for using it. **If you do not keep this agreement, the homestay may ask the school to pay for this using your activity fund.**



GOING OUT:

Your safety is **very** important.

You must ask permission from your homestay parents before you go out, invite friends to your house, or if a friend invites you to stay overnight at their house. Your homestay parents will need the address and phone number to contact you in an emergency, for example, if an earthquake hits. You should always take your cell-phone with you and have an emergency plan for meeting your homestay if an earthquake occurs.



Your guardian and homestay will discuss a suitable time for you to be home each night. For junior students, weeknights are to be spent at home unless you are playing sports or participating in other school activities.

FAMILY TRIPS AND OUTINGS:

It is fun to join in with family outings and visits. This is a chance to see the country, make new friends and practise your English speaking skills.

There are many interesting places to go around Christchurch. We are very close to the beach, the mountains, hot pools, harbours, beautiful parks and walkways.



If your homestay family goes somewhere that involves spending some money, for example, the zoo, or a movie, check with your guardian and homestay family before you go, as to what money you may need to take with you. If your homestay family invites you on holiday with them over the term break, they will expect you to pay for the

costs of the trip.

HEALTH AND PROBLEMS:

Please speak with you homestay family about any problems. Don't be embarrassed, Kiwis understand that changes in climate and food can often affect your health. Your homestay parent will contact your guardian and the school if you are unwell. If you feel unwell at school tell your teacher. Your parents must inform the school if you have a known medical problem.

Sometimes problems arise. **Most problems are solved very quickly if you communicate them with your homestay parents.** Occasionally it may be necessary for a student to change his or her family but usually students remain happily in their families. Talk to your homestay parents or the school International Liaison as soon as you feel unhappy or uncomfortable about anything.

Here are some questions you should ask your homestay parents on your first week in their home.

- What do I call you? Can I call you by your first name?
- Where can I find extra blankets if I'm cold at night?
- Where can I put my dirty clothes?
- Should I wash my own underwear?
- May I use the bathroom toiletries? Where can I keep my bathroom toiletries?
- When is the best time for me to have a shower? How long may I stay in the shower?
- What time are meals?
- What would you like me to do at mealtimes? For example:
 - a) Help cook
 - b) Help set or clear the table
 - c) Help carry food to the table
 - d) Put everything away after the meal
 - e) Wash up / empty or stack the dishwasher
 - f) Dry up
 - g) Empty the rubbish bin etc.
- May I help myself to food, juice / milk etc. at any time or should I ask first?
- What areas of the home are strictly private e.g. parents' bedroom, office, pantry?
- May I put photos of my family or pictures on the wall in my bedroom?
- What arrangements are there for making lunch? On a school day? At the weekend?
- How do I get to and from school?
- Is there anything else you would like me know?
- Do you have any other rules you want me to follow?