

## Homesickness and Culture Shock

While students **may not realize or admit** that they are homesick or experiencing culture shock, they may in fact be experiencing these things if they exhibit some or all of the following behaviors:

- Making frequent **comparisons** to their home country/culture
- Displaying a **negative** attitude
- Spending hours **alone** in their bedroom or on the computer
- Communicating frequently with their natural parents or friends from home country
- Crying, **depression**
- Having **difficulty sleeping**
- Turning down many opportunities to become involved with host family, friends, school
- **Unwilling** to try new things

Help the host family understand that it is natural for students to experience culture shock and homesickness. Some things the host family can do to help students work through these feelings are:

- Maintain open and **honest communication** at all times.
- Ask students open-ended questions. If a student provides a one word answer, **show interest** by asking the student to explain further.
- Identify specific cultural differences and **discuss** them in order to better understand the student.
- Encourage the student to **get involved** in school and host family activities.
- Discuss the student's **interests**.
- Encourage the student to spend time after school and/or on the weekends with **friends**.
- Check in with the student **after they have spoken with their natural parents** to find out if they feel homesick.
- Remember to **focus on the particular student**, and not to compare their experience with a previous student or another current student on the program.

Let students know that it is normal for them to experience culture shock and some feelings of homesickness. Here are some ways to help them cope with these feelings:

- Talk about homesickness and culture shock. Acknowledge that this is simply a stage of **adjustment**, and that **it will get better**.
- Encourage the student to be open and honest with their host family about how they are feeling.
- Encourage the student to **share their culture** with their host family, such as cooking a family meal from their home country, or watching a movie from their country together and then discussing it.
- Brainstorm different activities to **get involved** in, whether through school, church, or the community. Recommend the student speak to their guidance counselor at school to learn of all the opportunities available to them.
- Encourage the student to **limit communication with home**. If this is difficult, set the goal for once a week to start.
- Remind the student that participating in new activities will require the student to **step out of their comfort zone**, but that doing this will allow the student to make friends and get as much out of their American cultural exchange experience as possible.
- Encourage the student to **communicate their feelings** and concerns with their support resources, such as their LC, Support Coordinator, or host family, rather than their natural parents.

Contact the student's Support Coordinator if:

- The student is withdrawing from their host family, from activities, or at school.
- The host family expresses frustration and does not seem able to solve the issues/concerns with the student.
- The host family has asked for the student to be removed from their home.
- There are reoccurring issues with the student that are not improving.
- The earlier you contact support, the better.