

Some things to consider with International Students

Thank you for taking this exciting journey by teaching or hosting International students.

These students may be the future leaders and ambassadors of their countries. They may even be on the pro tour later. It is still important to keep in mind that they are human. They will face obstacles on their journey and hopefully by understanding what they face, you will be able to help them through the difficult times. Participating in this experience will not only help the student, but it will usually enhance your life and your family will find it very rewarding.

Challenges International students may face:

- Language problems
- homesickness
- Mood swing with culture adjustment
- Food differences
- Adjustment to a new educational system and local/religious customs
- Financial problems
- Unfriendliness/fear of racism/violence
- Difficulty getting around to get things they need
- Going to another school in another culture is an experience that is exciting and stressful.

Understanding Cultural Change and Culture Shock

Many students go through some or all stages of culture shock. If you are aware of it you will be better able to identify it and support them as they adjust.

Initially all students go through the shock. Students may experience apprehension; emotional discomfort, stress, and their needs are higher. This can last anywhere from a few months to a year, or longer. At first they may be fascinated, intrigued, open, willing to explore and take risks. Then they may go through the flight stage where they may feel inadequate, lonely, isolated, take unusual amounts of time for sleeping or grooming or staying in their room. You may see signs of sadness or unexpected mood swings. They may try to avoid local people and stay with others from their own culture. Minor health issues may arise, usually stress related.

Eventually they will reach the fit stage. They will compare their life with life back home. They will reach a point where they are feeling more productive in school and social life, they are less annoyed with the host culture, they develop an ability to appreciate the positive and handle the negatives of the new culture. They may display greater sensitivity to the host culture and understand what is going on around them. From here they can focus in. They will start to tackle daily challenges of academic life. They rely less on others. School and sports may become their

driving force. You will hear less from them. They try harder with speaking and comprehension, less time is devoted to leisure. Encourage your student(s) throughout the stages because the little things will make the experience richer.

At this point, the International student will hit their stride, establishing a routine that is less rigorous. Their anxiety and fear of failure decreases and they are more open to social activities and being involved in the community. Take advantage of this season and do things with them.

Then the time quickly comes for them to graduate or move back home. They start to refocus on the next phase of their life. It's a time of excitement but the apprehension about their future begins. Relationships can become strained or awkward. A distance may develop as they prepare to move on to the unknown. It is a natural process of easing the physical separation by creating a psychological distance. Some students will ask you to see them off at the airport, while others prefer to silently slip away. Students returning home often face reverse culture shock and they don't want to leave. You may hear from them again on their own time.

Guidelines for communication and hospitality

At Niagara Academy not only are we hosting International students in a new culture and new academic setting, but they are also athletes, and they need you to understand what they are going through. They are adjusting to a new culture, a new school, new training regimen and trying to cope with the stress from all of this. Offer them water, food, family, fun, activities, integration, language practice, transportation and help for the little things. This will make the transition and the experience much easier for all of you.

- Listen attentively
- Ask open ended questions but don't get too personal and don't ask too many at a time.
- Practice silent periods. Something is not always wrong if they are quiet. They may need quiet or a break.
- Speak slowly and distinctly but don't raise your voice. They can hear you, they may not be able to understand you.
- If you ask them if they understand they will usually say yes. Find another way to learn if you are being understood.
- Try to avoid the use of slang, idioms, jokes, humour. It may not be funny to them.
- Learn some of their language and culture but don't think you know everything.
- Be very careful about physical contact. Not all cultures are touchy, feely and gestures such as hugging can be misunderstood. Develop a relationship and understand their culture and give personal space.
- Respect they may have differences of opinion. Avoid controversial subjects of discussion.

- Keep your word and be consistent. Trust takes time and you need to spend time with them. Remember they are not adults. They need a nurturing environment and support.
- Relax and be yourself.
- Include them in your family.
- Show them around
- Introduce them to others
- Be welcoming
- Ask them if they have any food preferences or dietary restrictions
- Be flexible and willing to adjust to last minute changes.
- Understand their schedules and plans. Communicate daily.
- Understand that they may do things differently.
- Explain your customs, holidays and everything else. Respect theirs.
- Allow students time to be comfortable around pets.
- Make sure they understand your house ways.
- Celebrate their birthday. Help them document their trip.
- Be patient with them. It is a big thing to go to another country to learn another language and live with another family.
- Most of all, enjoy your time together.