

INTERACTING WITH YOUR INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS

PREPARE TO MEET YOUR STUDENT

1. Strive to reach out in genuine friendship with unconditional love.
2. Read something about their country before you meet one another so that you can ask informed questions. Have a world map available so that your new friend can show you where they are from. Have a map showing where you are from as well.
3. Pray that God would prepare the hearts of those He is sending your way.



DURING YOUR FIRST MEETING

- Pray you can be friendly and relaxed upon first meeting. Most likely you will both be a little nervous meeting one another for the first time. A smile goes a long way to making people feel welcomed.
- Take the time to learn their name in their language even if they have an English nickname. If necessary, write down their name phonetically. Ask them what they would like to be called and let them know what to call you along with names of other family members. It may be helpful for you to write these out for them. Ask them what they would feel comfortable calling you in their home culture.
- Speak clearly and at a normal speed but slow down as needed. There's no need to speak loudly. Ask open-ended questions to draw them out. If your stated goal in meeting is for them to practice their English, do not try to correct every error. Sometimes you can simply repeat what is said, but with correct English. For example: "I want to know is, where is the shopping." "You're asking where to go shopping?"
- Things to talk about—their family, home country, schooling, their major area of study or future plans. Be sure to let them ask you questions as well.
- Avoid "the U.S. is best" attitude or coming across as proud or boastful. Ask thoughtful questions and genuinely listen for their observations about American life and customs. Find out what they would like to know more about. Stay cool and don't react if comments come across to you as critical towards the U.S. As you build a relationship with one another, look for areas you can talk about where you share things in common. The goal is to make your new friend feel comfortable asking questions and sharing ideas.
- Asking Questions—You may get asked a question you consider too personal to ask people you've just met in our culture (e.g., "How much do you make?" "How much do you weigh?" or "How old are you?"). Don't be offended. Simply answer, "okay," "plenty," "enough." We may find that our questions may illicit similar kinds of responses from them. Be patient with yourself and your new friend. It takes time to learn what questions are okay to ask in another culture.
- Ask them how to say a phrase in their language, such as, "Hello, how are you?" Write it out phonetically and practice it, so that you can surprise them on your next meeting.



INVITING THEM INTO YOUR HOME

- Don't feel that you need to go to great lengths to clean your house or prepare a special meal. A simple meal served with genuine interest and care can go a long ways to developing a good friendship.
- Students may be interested in getting a tour of your home, but don't feel you need to do this. Think what would be appropriate in their culture. If your guests are staying overnight, let them know where they will sleep. As a courtesy, show them where light switches are or how appliances work, don't assume they will figure it out.
- In serving food to internationals, rice, chicken, breads, vegetables, salads, stews and soups are safe menu options, but be sure to ask directly if they have dietary restrictions or food sensitivities you should know about. Commonly, Jews don't eat pork or mix milk with meat, Muslims don't eat pork or shellfish, and Hindus don't eat beef and some don't eat eggs. Many from a variety of backgrounds are vegetarians, so if they are be sure to include vegetable protein items. Fruit, brownies, cookies or ice cream are good options for dessert.
- If you pray before meals, simply introduce this by letting them know that it is customary for your family to thank God before you eat.
- Smoking is more common in other countries than it is in the U.S. Let students know whether you are ok with them smoking in the house or outside.
- If you have guests sign a guest book, ask them when they sign to indicate their birth dates so that you might remember them on their birthdays in the future.

ABOUT YOUR CHRISTIAN WITNESS

- As Christians, the main witness of your faith will be through how you live out your life before others. As you do, your student may ask questions that give you an opportunity to explain your faith and convictions. Be sensitive to wait for the right moments to share. Don't try to force or manipulate the situation or conversation so you can talk about Christ.
- Whether or not your student shows any spiritual interest, your goal is to love your student unconditionally.
- Your testimony will be one of your most effective tools in your sharing. Let it come up naturally, as part of your life story. Be sure to let them share their own faith convictions and learn what is important to them.



- In discussing spiritual topics, be sensitive to avoid arguments of any kind. What good is it to win a point but lose their trust?
- Do not try to compare religious beliefs in conversation. If your friend wants to talk about their faith, listen respectfully and with genuine interest as a learner and answer questions as they come up.
- Avoid Christian jargon when explaining Christian concepts. For example, if you say “you must be born again” to a Hindu, they may agree, but have a very different understanding of what that term means. Don’t assume concepts like sin, sacrifice, atonement are commonly understood.
- If you do make a mistake along the way, be quick to apologize. Your goal is to have and develop a relationship built on respect, trust and acceptance.
- Some of the students you will meet are Christians and would be open to being invited to a religious service the first time you meet. If the student accepts an invitation, explain what will happen ahead of time so they feel comfortable (e.g., the Lord’s supper, passing the offering plate). Make sure they know they don’t have to participate in anything they feel uncomfortable with.
- It’s usually not best to invite students to a church event or religious service the first time you meet them, but it can be very natural to invite them later in your friendship. Allow your student to freely choose what they would like to do with you.

OTHER WAYS TO REACH OUT TO YOUR STUDENT

- Take them cookies or send along homemade food.
- Give your international friend an opportunity to cook their favorite foods and recipes for you and your family.
- Email them articles or news items about their home countries and other topics you’ve discussed.
- Get together socially with other Conversation Partner families in your community. If you don't know any other families, contact IFI. IFI will plan activities that you are welcome to participate in together with your student.
- Encourage them to call you when they have free time or would like to visit. Let them know you are there for them.
- Call or text your friend weekly to learn how their week is going.
- Offer to take them shopping or let them know when you are available to get together.
- Feel free to text or use WhatsApp, whichever they prefer.
- Send them pictures of your times together, birthday cards and greeting/holiday cards.
- Pray for your friend, their studies and life here along with prayers for their family back home.
- Enjoy your international friend!

Questions?

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