Experience America!
Become an au pair in the U.S.

Au Pair Handbook
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Welcome Messages

Dear Au Pair,

Welcome to the AuPairCare family! Since 1989, AuPairCare has placed over 40,000 au pairs with host families across the United States and we look forward to working with you.

As an official au pair agency designated by the U.S. Department of State, AuPairCare will work with you to:

- sponsor your J-1 visa
- organize your travel to and from the United States
- arrange for your match with a host family
- offer local support throughout your time in the United States
- help you extend your au pair program for up to an additional year if you’d like

This *Au Pair Handbook* is designed to provide you with practical information about the au pair exchange program. This handbook provides information on how to:

- understand the au pair program guidelines and requirements
- interview and match with your host family
- prepare for your year in the United States
- complete the required Pre-Departure Orientation Project
- settle in for a successful year with your new host family and community

To prepare for your year abroad, be sure to read this handbook *fully* prior to your arrival in the United States. Please print a copy and bring it with you, as you will want to refer to it regularly before and during your program participation. You can always access the electronic version in *Au Pair Room* and can search the document electronically for specific topics of interest.

Please also use our online resource *Au Pair Room* where you can find detailed travel information and information about your Pre-Departure Orientation Project ([www.aupairroom.com](http://www.aupairroom.com))

AuPairCare would like to wish you a very exciting and memorable year with your host family. We look forward to welcoming you to your new home and community. Congratulations on your decision to become an au pair!

Warm Regards,

[Signature]

Vice President, AuPairCare
United States Department of State
Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20547

Dear Au Pair Program Participant:

On behalf of the United States Department of State, I welcome your consideration of the Au Pair Program. This educational and cultural exchange program provides a unique opportunity for young adults, such as yourself, to experience first-hand the richness and variety of a culture different from your own. It is our hope that such an experience will promote and foster a better understanding of the values and aspirations of the American people.

A people-to-people program-- such as the Au Pair Program-- that involves living in another family’s home presents not only a great opportunity for rewards, but also the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. In order to be as clear as possible about the benefits as well as the responsibilities of the Au Pair Program I am furnishing specific information that all potential and au pair participants should consider before deciding whether participation in the Au Pair Program is appropriate for them.

Au pair participants are screened and selected by organizations that have been designated by the U.S. Department of State to conduct au pair programs. These organizations must interview au pair applicants in English, compile and verify references, administer a personality profile test and secure a medical evaluation and criminal background check for all au pair applicants selected for participation in the program. We have recently amended the regulations governing this program to make it easier for American host families to verify the information provided to the sponsoring organization during the screening and selection process. We encourage all American families to take advantage of this opportunity.

Au pair participants are expected to spend a full twelve-month period with one American host family. Au pair participants are also expected to provide not more than 10 hours of child care services per day and not more than 45 hours of child care services per week.

Au pairs are compensated on a weekly basis. This compensation is based on an hourly wage – the current Federal Minimum Wage in the United States – less deductions by the host family for room and board. (The amount of this deduction is based on regulations developed by the U.S. Department of Labor.) The au pair’s weekly wages are calculated based upon 45 hours of childcare services, not on the actual number of hours worked. Au pairs are currently paid a weekly wage of $195.75. Further increases in the Federal Minimum wage will result in corresponding increases in the weekly wage paid to au pair participants in upcoming years.

Au pair participants who have been screened and selected for program participation come to the U.S. to attend an orientation session provided by the sponsoring organization. At this orientation session, the au pair participant receives twenty-four hours of child development instruction, four of which are devoted to infant child development issues. The au pair receives an additional eight hours of child safety instruction, four of which are devoted to infant child safety issues. American host families may wish to arrange additional childcare instruction or training classes for the au pair they have selected once the au pair has arrived in the home.
Sponsoring organizations are required to be in touch each month with the host family and au pair participant. The purpose of this contact is to insure that any problems that may develop between the host family and au pair participant are resolved quickly and without disruption.

The sponsoring organization, along with the host family, must ensure that the au pair has enrolled in and is attending classes at an accredited post-secondary educational institution for not less than six hours of academic credit or its equivalent. Its equivalent has been interpreted to mean the trimester or quarter hour system. Full compliance with the educational component is mandatory of all au pair participants. Failure to meet the educational component of the program is grounds for termination.

I hope that this overview clarifies the obligations and requirements of the Au Pair Program. It is important that all American host families and au pair participants understand these points before the final decision to participate in the program is made. The Department of State is unable to mediate disputes involving American host families, sponsoring organizations and au pair participants.

Sincerely,

William B. Bader

United States Department of State
The AuPairCare Program

Program Goals

The au pair cultural exchange program allows carefully selected young people to live with American families and assist with childcare. The program is rewarding in two ways. First, you benefit from the enriching experience of learning about American culture during your stay with a host family. Second, your host family benefits from having consistent, reliable, in-home childcare and the opportunity to learn about you and your culture.

Program Guidelines

AuPairCare is designated by the United States Department of State (DOS) as one of a select few organizations to sponsor foreign au pairs. This designation permits AuPairCare to issue government forms to qualified au pairs, allowing them to secure a J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa and remain in the United States for one year, with the possibility to extend for an additional 6, 9, or 12 months.

As an au pair, you can trust that your host family has agreed to follow these guidelines:

- Treat you as a member of their family and include you in many family activities
- Speak English at home so that you can improve your English language skills
- Spend the first three days with you in their home to train you and help you settle in
- Provide you with a private bedroom
- Provide you with meals each day
- Ensure you work no more than 10 hours per day
- Ensure you work no more than 45 hours per week
- Ensure you have at least one full weekend off each month
- Allow you two weeks of paid vacation time
- Pay a weekly stipend of $195.75 (as of July 2009)
- Provide a maximum of $500 towards your education requirement
- Provide a means of transportation for you (either by car, bus system, car-pool, etc.) in order to attend classes and AuPairCare events
- Provide auto insurance for you if you will be expected to drive during your work hours

In exchange, you will do the following for your host family:

- Keep the children safe at all times
- Feed, bathe, and play with the children
- Do housework as it pertains to the children (preparing children’s meals, doing children’s laundry, making children’s beds, tidying children’s rooms and toys, dusting or vacuuming your room and children’s areas, etc.)
- Transport the children to and from school and activities as needed
- Focus exclusively on your au pair duties during your work hours
- Participate as a member of the family, helping with tasks around the house
- Respect your host family’s household rules and expectations
Program Costs

Your host family pays a substantial program fee that covers the recruiting and screening of au pairs by AuPairCare overseas partner agencies, your international plane ticket to the United States, Au Pair Academy orientation, medical and accident insurance, and the services of an AuPairCare local staff member who provide support to you and your host family throughout the year. In addition, your host family pays for your one-way transportation from Au Pair Academy to their host community, the weekly stipend paid to you each week according to Department of State guidelines, any additional car insurance which may be required, and tuition expenses (up to $500 per year).

You will be responsible for arranging and paying for transportation to and from the gateway city in your home country. You are also responsible for fees to check your luggage during your air travel to and from your host family home.

If you return to your home country for a non-emergency visit during your au pair year, you will be responsible for the costs of the international flight and travel. If you do not complete your full au pair year, you will be responsible for the cost of your airfare home.

The AuPairCare Support Staff

AuPairCare has a team of support staff ready to help you adjust to life in the United States. The support team will also help you learn how to successfully provide the childcare your host family is counting on.

Whom You Should Contact

BEFORE you arrive in the United States, you should direct all questions to your overseas partner agency.

AFTER you arrive in the United States, you should direct all of your questions first to your Area Director. If your Area Director is not available and this issue is urgent, please contact:

1. **Area Director**: Your first point of contact at AuPairCare is always your Area Director.

2. **Regional Manager**: In the event that you are not able to reach Area Director and the issue is urgent, please call your Regional Manager. You can locate contact information in Au Pair Room in the “My Representatives” section.

3. **Emergency Line**: In case of EMERGENCY after business hours, call 1-800-428-7247 and you will be connected to AuPairCare’s 24-hour emergency service. The emergency service will try to contact your Area Director, Regional Manager, or a manager from AuPairCare’s headquarters. Someone from AuPairCare will contact you as soon as possible if the matter is urgent.

Emergencies include situations where someone is in an unsafe situation or has a major health issue. Issues that are not considered emergencies include routine program or travel questions that can be addressed during normal business hours, communication issues with host families, and issues accessing online resources.
Area Director

Your main point of contact in the United States will be your Area Director, who lives within an hour’s drive of your host family home. When needed, your Area Director can call on others to provide additional support and assistance. Your Area Director will:

- Visit you and your host family within two weeks of your arrival at the host family’s home
- Put you in contact with other au pairs in your area
- Provide you with information on community resources, such as local educational options for your coursework requirement
- Organize local social and cultural events for au pairs
- Maintain close contact with you and your host family during the year
- Encourage effective communication and issue resolution for you and your host family
- Answer all of your questions about travel and official documents

The Area Director’s most important role is to help you and your host family both have a successful and enjoyable year. Communication and adjustment questions, homesickness, or misunderstandings are best overcome with assistance from your Area Director. The Department of State requires that you talk with your Area Director at least monthly. AuPairCare encourages you to attend the monthly events your Area Director organizes. Your Area Director will be an incredible support and resource for you, and is looking forward to meeting you soon.

Please make a note of your Area Director’s name and contact information here. You can find this information in Au Pair Room (www.aupairroom.com) under “My Representatives.”

My Area Director’s Name: __________________________________________________________

My Area Director’s Phone Number: _________________________________________________

My Area Director’s Email Address: _________________________________________________

Regional Manager

AuPairCare Regional Managers operate from regional offices around the United States and work closely with the AuPairCare Area Directors. They communicate with the San Francisco office and help solve any problems that may arise with your host family placement.

Please make a note of your Regional Manager’s name and contact information here. You can find this information in Au Pair Room (www.aupairroom.com) under “My Representatives.”

My Regional Manager’s Name: ______________________________________________________

My Regional Manager’s Phone Number: ______________________________________________

My Regional Manager’s Email Address: ______________________________________________

My Area Director’s Name: __________________________________________________________
San Francisco Headquarters Office

AuPairCare maintains a full-time professional staff at its headquarters in San Francisco. Staff members work closely with AuPairCare’s field staff representatives and Regional Managers, as well as with AuPairCare’s overseas partner offices to coordinate all aspects of the program. They process host family and au pair applications, provide assistance with the matching process, communicate with overseas offices, and coordinate flight arrangements.

Please check in with your Area Director before calling the San Francisco office. In case of EMERGENCY, the San Francisco office can be reached at 1-800-428-7247. If it is after business hours, you will be connected to AuPairCare’s 24-hour emergency service.

Overseas Partner Offices

Overseas partner agency offices are located around the world and are responsible for recruiting, screening, and preparing au pairs for our program. You should direct all questions you have before your arrival in the United States to your overseas partner office. The overseas office maintains close contact with the San Francisco office during your time in the United States. For your own reference, note the name and contact information for your partner office here:

My Overseas Agency__________________________________________________________

My Contact Name____________________________________________________________

My Contact Email: ___________________________________________________________

My Contact Phone Number:____________________________________________________


Au Pair Room: Your Online Resource

As you know, Au Pair Room is AuPairCare’s website created especially for au pairs who participate in the program. You used Au Pair Room to submit your program application. Au Pair Room also provides you with valuable resources to prepare for your program year and to use throughout your stay in the United States.

Once you log in to the Au Pair Room website, you can:

- Apply to become an au pair.
  - Submit your application online
  - Check the status of your application
  - Upload photos to share with potential host families

- Participate in the Matching Process to find your host family
  - Update your contact information
  - View current and past host family interviews
  - Learn about host families who have invited you to interview, including basic information about their family and community you should read to prepare for your interview
  - Access email addresses for host families who have asked to interview you
  - Learn about Skype and how to use this tool to interview with families who also use Skype for international calling

- Prepare for your arrival in the U.S.
  - See details about your host family
  - Read "Culture Grams" to learn about your state in the U.S.
  - View and print electronic plane ticket and itinerary
  - Access information about your local AuPairCare staff
  - Find au pairs who are currently placed in your region and their email addresses
  - Link to the Au Pair Café blog to communicate with other au pairs

- Access information while on program
  - Link to the Au Pair Café blog to communicate with other au pairs
  - Learn about insurance coverage and download insurance cards
  - Guidelines and forms to use to complete the educational requirement
  - Learn about the Au Pair Extension Program to stay longer than one year

- Access resources for completing the program
  - Request your return flight home
  - View and print your return flight itinerary
  - View and print your official program completion certificate

You can refer to this handbook or log into your Au Pair Room account at any time to access useful program information as well as questions frequently asked by au pairs. Just log on using the user name and password you created when you applied. You may want to write them here:

User Name_________________________  Password _________________________

Website for login: www.aupairroom.com or click here
What Happens After I Apply?

Overview

The entire process from the time you submit your application to when you arrive in your host family’s home can take as little as 6-10 weeks— or longer depending on how many families are looking for an au pair with your specific qualifications. Be patient with the matching process, as families often take time to review and interview many candidates before matching with an au pair.

Here are the steps you’ll follow along the way to joining your host family in the United States:

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<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Submit your complete application</td>
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| 2    | Receive an interview invitation from a host family | You will receive an email notification when a host family requests an interview with you.  
You should log into AuPairRoom to view information about the family who wants to interview. Read all of the information about their family and community.
You may receive phone calls and emails from host families in the U.S. to set up interviews. You can also email them directly to set up a time for your interview. |
| 3    | Interview | You are required to interview on the phone at least two times with a host family before you can agree to match with them. Prepare carefully for each interview and be ready to ask relevant questions about their childcare needs and lifestyle. |
| 4    | Agree to match and choose an arrival date | Seriously consider a match offer, as you are not guaranteed additional interviews with other families. Be sure to match with a family whom you are excited about and for whom you are confident you can meet their needs.
Once your host family asks you to match and you agree, you and your host family will select an arrival date. You will see confirmation of the match in Au Pair Room within 7 days of the match request. |
Prepare for your arrival

As soon as you match, log in to Au Pair Room to download your host family’s full application, and the directions for your Pre-Departure Project. Your overseas partner agency can also provide information about the Pre-Departure Project.

You should begin work on your required Pre-Departure Orientation Project as soon as you match. Plan to spend at least 8 hours preparing this. It will be a gift for your host family and a resource for you to use during Au Pair Academy training.

Two weeks before your arrival, log in to Au Pair Room for flight information, how to pack for your trip, and information about your new community in the United States.

Attend Au Pair Academy

You will arrive in New Jersey to attend AuPairCare’s Au Pair Academy. You will meet other au pairs and receive training in child safety, child development, and CPR/First Aid.

Arrive at your host family home

After completing the Au Pair Academy, you will travel to your host family’s home. They will either pick you up at Au Pair Academy or at the airport. One parent or another responsible adult is required to remain in the home for the first three days after your arrival. This will ease your transition and adjustment. Your Area Director will also contact you within 48 hours of your arrival to welcome you.

Attend Arrival Orientation

Within two weeks of your arrival to your host family’s home, your Area Director will visit for an in-home orientation with you and your host family together.

The Application Approval Process

Once you have submitted your application online through Au Pair Room:

- The AuPairCare overseas partner agency office will review your application forms and send your completed application to AuPairCare’s San Francisco headquarters. If your application is incomplete, your local office will not send it to AuPairCare until you provide the additional documents and/or information.

- AuPairCare staff will review your application to ensure that the application is complete, and approve photos you uploaded in Au Pair Room to share with host families. Photos should highlight your experience working with children and your activities in your local community and with your family. Photos of you smiling, playing with children, and
enjoying your favorite hobbies are especially helpful. Photos of you with your friends in social settings are not as useful to host families when they are assessing whether you’ll be a good child care provider for their children.

- Once AuPairCare approves your application, your au pair profile will be viewable by host families. Once your application is online, host families may contact you to interview you and discuss your childcare qualifications in depth. Be patient, as it can take some time for families to start to call and email you.
Matching With a Host Family

Availability for Calls

It is critically important to verify your contact information in *Au Pair Room* and update it regularly. In order for a family to reach you to conduct an interview, they need to have accurate home phone and cell phone numbers, email address and hours and dates of availability.

If you are going on vacation or will be unreachable for an extended period of time, please update your contact information in *Au Pair Room* so families will know this. If families report difficulty reaching you to conduct interviews, your application may be put on “hold” and not shown to host families until AuPairCare has been able to reach you. If AuPairCare is unable to reach you, your application may be cancelled.

AuPairCare also recommends that you create a Skype account if possible and familiarize yourself with how to use Skype to conduct phone calls. (Visit [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com) for more information.) Do a few test Skype phone calls with friends to become comfortable with the system before your interviews.

Phone Interviews

Preparing for a Phone Interview

AuPairCare recommends that you visit *Au Pair Room* regularly to see if host families have selected you to interview. Once a family requests an interview with you, you will receive an automated email letting you know.

The family may email you to arrange a mutually convenient time to conduct a phone interview. Many families prefer to email an au pair prior to calling the au pair for the interview, so it is very important to check your emails frequently. You can also initiate contact with a host family once you see their email address in the “My Interviews” area of *Au Pair Room*. When you email the host family, try to set up a specific time (“between 10:00 and 10:30 am”) when the host family can call you. Specify the best way for them to make the call (cell phone, home phone, Skype). When the interview day arrives, make sure you are waiting for the call in a quiet place where you will be able to hear the family clearly and without distractions.

In some cases, the family may call you directly for an interview without pre-arranging an interview time via email. If this happens, take a moment to make sure you are in a quiet place where you can focus on the phone call.

The host family is allowed only a limited period of time to interview you, so please arrange to be available when they request an interview. Host families typically interview a set of au pairs within a few days, and then make their selection. It is to your benefit to make yourself available when it is convenient for the host family, if possible.

To prepare for your interview, log into *Au Pair Room* and read all of the information about the family in the “My Interviews” area. You will see the family’s name, the number and age of their
children, the personal information they chose to share with you, their location in the United States, and their email address. Take time to read all of this information, as the family will expect you to know it before they call for your phone interview. You may want to print it to refer to during the phone interview.

Many families find it helpful to exchange emails with an au pair throughout the interview process. While email may provide you with a more detailed understanding of the family, it should never replace the two required telephone conversations. It may also be convenient to use online chat tools to converse with the family; these chats also cannot replace a phone conversation.

The First Phone Interview

You should prepare what you would like to say to a prospective host family before your interview. You may want to compose a list of questions to ask the host family, such as:

- What are the names of everyone in your family? How old are your children?
- What are you looking for in an au pair? What skills do you consider most important for your au pair?
- What would my role be within your family?
- What would be my typical work schedule?
- What activities do your children most enjoy? How could I participate in these with the children?

During this initial conversation, the family might confirm some aspects of your application that are important to them, such as when you can come to the U.S., your childcare experience, your hobbies or interests, and your driving ability. The first call should be reserved for conversations about the family’s children and your childcare experience. You can save other questions for the second interview.

The interview must be conducted in English, even if the host family speaks your native language. Obviously, you must conduct the interview without any help from friends or family members with strong English skills.

Remember to treat this call as you would any other job interview. Plan to be in a quiet place where you can easily hear the phone conversation without distractions.

After your interview, it is polite to send a short thank you email to the host family.

The Second Phone Interview

AuPairCare requires that a family and au pair have at least two phone conversations in English before requesting a match. These calls must be at least 24 hours apart.

If the host family believes your skills meet their needs, they will invite you to set up a second phone call with you. This allows both you and the host family to carefully consider the first conversation. If the host family decides that you are not a match for their particular family situation, they will not call you a second time. If you decide that you are not interested in joining their family, you may inform them via email after the first interview or when they call a second time.
During this second interview, you will want to have an in-depth discussion about the host family’s needs and expectations, as well as your own. Ask open-ended questions that will allow the family to talk freely, such as:

- How does your family like to spend free time? What activities do you do with your children?
- Can you tell me about the community where you live?
- Can you tell me more about your general schedule and childcare requirements?
- What kind of driving would I need to do while caring for the children?
- What is your approach to teaching and disciplining your children?
- Why are you excited to host an au pair? (Be sure to share with the family your hopes for what type of family you’d like to match with, too.)

Your Match

The Match Request

If a host family wants to request a match with you, they will ask you to match with them. They can request the match at the end of the second phone interview, or via email or another phone call after the second interview.

AuPairCare’s matching process is a mutual match. Both the host family and the au pair can make a decision about whether to match with each other. You should seriously consider an offer to match when a family invites you to match with them, as you are not guaranteed additional interviews with other families. Be sure to match with a family whom you are excited about and for whom you are confident you can meet their childcare needs.

When you are considering a match offer, ask yourself “Do I feel like I will fit in well with this family?” and “Do I have the skills and experience required to meet this family’s childcare needs?” Your primary concern should not be the family’s location in the United States or the size of their family. Au pairs find quickly that they fall in love with their new community regardless of where it is, and bond with their host family’s children regardless of how many children are in the family.

When you agree to match with your family, you and your family will choose an arrival date that you both agree to. Many families prefer a specific arrival date due to scheduling needs for their childcare. If possible, please try to accommodate the family’s requested arrival date.

Once you have agreed to match, you may not change your mind if another family asks you to match with them.

Finalizing Your Match

Once you and your host family have agreed to match and determined your arrival date, the family will notify AuPairCare. AuPairCare will then process the match to finalize it. It can take 7-10 business days to finalize a match after your host family invites you to match with them.

When the match is finalized your au pair profile will no longer be viewable by other host families.

You will be notified that your match has been processed and approved in Au Pair Room. Once your match is finalized, you will be able to access your host family’s complete application in Au Pair Room. Be sure to read it and print it. It will have important information about your family that you will need when you prepare your Pre-Departure Orientation Project. As soon as your match is
finalized, you should talk with your overseas agency to understand how to prepare to apply for your visa.

**Thank Your Family for the Match**

Please stay in touch with your family before you arrive in the United States. Continue to exchange emails. Send them a postcard from your home country. Set up a Skype conversation to meet children who are old enough for it. Let your host family know you are excited about joining their family!

**Commitment to Your Match**

Once you agree to match with a host family, your host family and AuPairCare will begin to prepare for your travel and arrival. Your new family and children will be preparing to welcome you to their home. AuPairCare will be arranging for your travel and training at Au Pair Academy. You will be preparing for life in the United States.

However, if for any reason you cancel the match, you will be responsible for a cancellation fee and the cost of any airline tickets that have already been booked for you. Please refer to your signed Au Pair Agreement for full details on cancellations.
Preparing for your Program

Once you match, your life will be busy with preparations for your year in the United States. Here are the most important tasks to focus on as you get ready to join your host family:

Your Visa

The most important task in preparing to become an au pair is to secure a J-1 visa. This will allow you to enter the United States. Without it, you cannot participate in the program even if you have matched with a host family.

To secure your visa, you will need to successfully interview at a U.S. Embassy. AuPairCare strongly recommends that you make your visa appointment as soon as possible after matching. The wait time for visa appointments can be long, and you should schedule your interview as quickly as possible.

Your local overseas agency office will provide you with instructions on how to obtain your J-1 visa. You can also access information about the visa process in Au Pair Room, including the personal DS 2019 I.D. number that you will need when you apply for a visa.

AuPairCare will send the DS-2019 visa form and an immigration letter to your local recruiting office in the week you match, and you will pick those forms up from your overseas partner agency.

Prepare carefully for your visa interview. It is absolutely critical that you receive the visa before you can travel to the United States. Be sure to ask your overseas partner agency what documents your local U.S. Embassy expects to review, including a copy of your host family’s application and your personal bank statements.

Before you go into your interview, make sure you have prepared answers to these key questions:

- Who is your host family? What are their names? Where do they live?
- What will your job be as an au pair?
- What are your professional goals? How does the au pair program advance your professional goals?
- Do you plan to return home?
- Do you have financial responsibilities in your home country?

During your interview, answer all questions honestly. Provide short, clear answers. Make sure your interviewer understands that you intend to return to your home country at the end of your au pair program participation.
Your Pre-departure Orientation Project

Before you leave your home country, you must complete a Pre-Departure Orientation Project. In order to fulfill the U.S. Department of State’s training requirements, you must spend at least 8 hours preparing this project. Instructions about this project are available in Au Pair Room in the “Info Center” section. If you do not understand the information about this project, contact your local overseas partner agency office immediately.

This project must be finished before you leave your home country so that you can present it at the Au Pair Academy when you arrive. It cannot be completed on the airplane trip to the United States because it requires you to conduct research online and include photos from your life and community.

Please bring the original project to the United States in your carry-on luggage. It will be evaluated on the first day of the Au Pair Academy. You must bring a paper copy of your project. Do not bring your project on a CD-ROM disc or jump-drive. You will not be able to print your project at the Au Pair Academy.

You will present your project to your new host parents when you arrive in their home, along with any small gifts you bring for the children. This is a very special gift for your new family and shows your commitment to your time abroad. Please devote careful preparation and creativity to it.

Your Pre-Departure “To Do” List

☐ Apply for your J-1 visa right away after you match with your family. Make your visa appointment for a date as soon as possible.

☐ Complete your required Pre-Departure Orientation Project
  ○ You must spend at least 8 hours on the project. Prepare it as an impressive gift for your host family. It should show them your commitment to the program, enthusiasm about their family, commitment to childcare, and your creativity.

☐ Secure your International Driver’s License
  ○ In your au pair agreement with AuPairCare, you agreed to obtain an International Driving License before coming to the United States. You can not apply for an International Driver’s License once you arrive in the United States—you must do so from your home country.

☐ Visit your doctor and update and fill prescriptions
  ○ If you take a particular medication regularly or wear eyeglasses or contact lenses, please bring a copy of the signed prescription so that you can obtain replacements while in the U.S. if needed. The travel insurance that provides health coverage while you are an au pair will not cover any pre-existing conditions that are present before your travel to the United States. If you have any such condition, be sure to seek and complete the necessary medical treatments and bring prescriptions before coming to the United States.

☐ Visit your dentist and your doctor
  ○ It is a good idea to have a dental exam before you leave for the United States. Dental care is expensive in the U.S. and non-emergency procedures are not covered by the program insurance policy. Make an appointment to see a dentist prior to leaving your home country.
If you have any special medical conditions, review the health insurance coverage carefully and consider purchasing additional health insurance if needed.

- Make copies of your important documents
  - Before leaving your home country, you must make two sets of photocopies of your passport, visa, and International Driver’s License. Leave one set of copies in your home country with your natural family. Bring the other set of copies with you to the U.S. and leave them in a safe place in your host family’s home. If your original passport is lost or stolen while you are in the United States, having these copies will make replacement much easier. If at any time you lose your passport, you should file a police report and contact your country’s embassy as soon as possible. If you lose your DS-2019 form, contact AuPairCare right away for a replacement.

- Show your family how to dial internationally (or use Skype) and give them your host family’s phone number and address.
  - Remember to tell them that you will be in training for the first week, so they should wait until Saturday to call you at your host family’s home.

- Prepare to bring at least $200 with you to the United States to pay for checked luggage fees, dinners during Au Pair Academy, the optional New York City tour during orientation, and other expenses for the first two weeks of your program. (You will not receive your first stipend payment from your host family until the end of your second week in the United States.)

- If you know you will travel in the United States after you complete your au pair program, consider buying an Airpass before you leave your home country.
  - You can purchase an Airpass from most major airlines. Airpasses are coupons sold outside of the U.S. that give you anywhere from 3 to 10 flights within the continental United States. Airpasses usually begin at around $400 for 3 coupons with the price increasing with each additional flight. They may be purchased either through a travel agency or directly from the airline.

Your Travel Preparations

Airline Tickets

Your international and domestic airfare will be arranged for you by AuPairCare and paid by AuPairCare. Your international airline itinerary will be available in Au Pair Room approximately two (2) weeks before your arrival date.

You are responsible for arranging and paying for your travel from your home town to the international gateway airport you choose in your home county. You are also responsible for the cost of checking your luggage. (See “Luggage Restrictions” for details.)

Luggage Restrictions

Before you pack for your trip, contact your airline to confirm luggage regulations, including dimensions, weight, and the number of bags you can check for free. Regulations on luggage will differ from airline to airline.
On international flights, you can usually bring 2 pieces of luggage to check-in, each weighing a maximum of 23kg. You can also bring 1 piece of carry-on luggage weighing up to 5kg. Airlines are very strict about their luggage policy and will charge you an additional fee for overweight baggage. Many airlines now charge a fee for checked baggage on international flights. Please contact your airline directly for details, and be sure you are prepared to pay any fees when checking in for your flight to the United States.

On domestic flights within the U.S., airlines usually charge $20 for the first checked bag, $30 for each additional checked bag, $100 for each overweight bag (generally over 23kg), and $100 for an oversize bag (where length + width + height is over 158 cm). Note that it will be much less expensive to pack multiple lighter, smaller bags rather than one or two very heavy bags!

AuPairCare is not responsible for luggage fees, so plan accordingly and bring funds to cover luggage fees. Most au pairs who pack carefully without overweight bags must pay roughly $50-$80 to check their luggage on the flight from Au Pair Academy to their host family. However, if the size and weight of your bags do not conform to the restrictions, you may have to pay up to $250 to check your luggage.

You can minimize your costs by planning carefully:

- Pack multiple lighter bags rather than one or two very heavy bags
- Pack in soft luggage, rather than hard suitcases that are heavy even when empty
- Don’t pack lots of heavy toiletries—you can always buy these in the U.S.
- If you choose to bring gifts for your host family, choose small, light items
- Pack light!

**What to Pack**

When thinking about what to pack, remember that the United States has a variety of climates. Be sure to research the climate where you will be living. In Au Pair Room you can find information about your specific state and the community you will be living in, including weather and average temperatures.

Remember that you will be taking care of children every day, so bring clothes that are appropriate for playing outdoors, that can get dirty and can be washed in a washing machine.

Also, pack lightly! You will likely want to do some shopping while in the U.S., so leave room to take your purchases with you at the end of your program. If you forget something at home, you can always have it shipped to you in the U.S., or find a replacement in the U.S. Remember that you’ll have to pay significant airline fees if your luggage is overweight!

Label each bag inside and out with your name and this address:

AuPairCare Au Pair Academy  
Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel  
2 Meadowlands Plaza  
East Rutherford NJ 07073  
PH. 201.896.0050
AuPairCare recommends that you consider the following when packing:

**In Your Carry-On Bag (accessible on the plane):**

- Your Pre-Departure Orientation Project
- A printout of this Au Pair Handbook
- A copy of your flight itinerary printed from Au Pair Room
- Your passport
- Your visa
- Your DS2019 form
- Additional photo identification (driver’s license, government ID card, etc.)
- The immigration letter you received from your local office
- A copy of the Travel Information you received from AuPairCare
- A minimum of $200 to use for: domestic baggage fees when you travel to your host family, snacks and expenses during travel to and from Au Pair Academy, and any other expenses you incur in the two weeks between when you leave home and when you receive your first weekly stipend from your host family.
- Your International Driver’s License
- Copies of your transcripts and diplomas (optional, but useful when registering for classes)
- An international phone calling card (optional)
- Medications and original written prescriptions from your doctors
- Toothbrush
- Glasses or contacts (if needed)
- One change of clothes and extra undergarments
- Books and music for the plane trip

**In the Bag You Will Have at Au Pair Academy:**

Make sure you pack all the things you will need at Au Pair Academy orientation in one separate bag. This is the bag you will take with you to your room and use at the Au Pair Academy. Upon arrival at Au Pair Academy you will be asked to store your other bags in a locked area for the full duration of orientation.

- Clothes to last you a week. Pack comfortable clothes that you’ll wear throughout class sessions and while hanging out with other au pairs in “off” hours.
- Toiletries to last you a week, including glasses or contact lenses
- Anything else you think you will need for the first week in the United States
In Your Other Luggage (not accessible during Au Pair Academy):

- Additional clothes and shoes
- Copies of any prescriptions or important medical information
- Copies of important documents (passport, visa, International Driver’s License)
- Music and photos that remind you of home
- A converter/ adaptor for any electronic items
- As a gesture of kindness to your host family, you may want to consider bringing small gifts from your home country. Gifts are a nice way to “break the ice” and share a little bit about your culture. Children’s music is especially appropriate. If you decide to bring gifts, be sure toys for children are age-appropriate, and that any gift is in compliance with U.S. customs regulations. Items such as meats, fish, fresh vegetables or fruit cannot be brought into the United States.

Some items you’ll want to leave at home include:

- A large supply of toiletries
  - These are heavy and can make your bag overweight. Most au pairs purchase shampoo, etc. once they arrive at their host family. Bring only enough to last through the first week or two of the program.
- Sheets, towels, and linens
  - All of these will be provided to you throughout your program, including at Au Pair Academy.
- Large quantities of clothing, electronics, and cosmetic/personal cleanliness items.
  - These are inexpensive in America. Don’t “over-pack” any of these, as you can easily buy them after you arrive.
Your Travel Day

You can find general information in *Au Pair Room* that will help you prepare for your travel. For updated travel information, security guidelines, and restrictions please visit the following U.S. Government web sites before you travel to the United States:

- *Transport Security Administration* for airport security, prohibited items: [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov)
- *Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)* for air travel information: [www.faa.gov/passengers/](http://www.faa.gov/passengers/)
- *National Weather Service (NOAA)* for temperature and weather: [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov)

Details on security

In the U.S., the Federal Aviation Administration requires that you have a government-issued photo ID for travel, such as your passport. You will not be allowed to pass the security checkpoint without the required documents. Keep your passport with you at all times—do not put it in your checked bags.

Luggage security

Airport security screening procedures have increased significantly. Examine everything that you normally pack in your suitcase and evaluate whether an object could be scrutinized by airport security. Consider removing anything that could be perceived as threatening or may raise suspicion at a security-screening checkpoint. This includes items found in manicure kits, etc. (For example, if you are travelling with any liquids in your carry-on luggage, each container must hold less than 3 ounces (88 ml). All liquid containers must fit into one quart-sized (946 ml) clear plastic bag.)

Avoid over-packing so that carry-on luggage and checked suitcases can be opened and closed with ease. AuPairCare recommends that you do not use locks that when checking bags on domestic flights within the United States because it may be opened for security screening. You may lock your bags while they are stored at *Au Pair Academy*.

Getting to the airport

Confirm your flight status before proceeding to the airport. You can do this online at the airline website or by calling the airline directly.

You should arrive at the airport at least two hours before your scheduled departure for domestic flights, and at least three hours before international flights. Be waiting at your departure gate at least an hour before departure if possible.

At the security checkpoint

In the United States, access beyond security is now restricted to passengers and employees only. Family and friends can not accompany travelers all the way to the gate, or meet them at the gate upon arrival.
When you approach the security checkpoint, have your ticket paperwork and photo ID available. You will not be permitted past the security check-in area without these documents.

Be prepared to demonstrate the operation of electronic equipment such as laptops, cell phones, etc. Be prepared for increased passenger and baggage-security screening. Do not make jokes of any kind about security issues, as the security team must by law take them seriously.

**At the boarding gate**

Maintain your sense of awareness and keep your possessions with you at all times. Keep your ticket paperwork and identification readily available.

Pay attention to announcements so that you are aware of any delays or changes regarding your flight.

**On your flight**

While you are onboard, the flight attendants will distribute the I-94 form for you to fill out before you land. This is a registration form for people who enter the U.S. as non-immigrants. This small white card is usually stapled to your passport when you go through Immigration (“Customs”) upon arrival to the United States.

Fill this form out very carefully. Errors are very difficult and time-consuming to fix later, and the information needs to be correct so that you can apply for U.S. government identification. **Make sure you fill out the I-94 form with information exactly as it appears on your passport.**

**Upon arrival at your destination**

If you have travelled on your international flight with other AuPairCare au pairs, stay together while you pass through Immigration (“Customs”), claim your bags and locate the shuttle transportation for transportation to the Au Pair Academy.

Have your checked luggage receipts available for verification when you pick up your luggage. Count your bags before you leave the baggage claim area to make sure you have everything.

**Transportation from the New York/ New Jersey Airport to Au Pair Academy**

AuPairCare has reserved a shuttle service to take you from the airport to the Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel in New Jersey. This van will bring you and the other au pairs directly to the Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel.

A shuttle representative will be waiting for you at the arrival area near baggage claim. The shuttle representative will be holding an AuPairCare sign. You will not need to pay or tip the driver.

If you arrive to baggage claim and do not see someone with an AuPairCare sign to greet you, please go directly to the airport Ground Transportation counter. There will be a complimentary
transportation phone where you can dial 22 and be connected directly to the shuttle dispatch for the shuttle company. If for any reason they are unable to contact the shuttle company, they should contact the Au Pair Academy staff at the Sheraton Meadowlands at 201-896-0500 and ask for Tracye Warfield, the Director of Au Pair Academy.

Your reservation on the shuttle has been confirmed and the driver has your name. You should always use this reserved shuttle to get to the Au Pair Academy. You should never accept rides from any other transportation company other than the AuPairCare shuttle. Doing so may be dangerous, and you may need to pay a high fee to the unknown company. If you do pay a fee to another transportation provider, AuPairCare will not reimburse you.
Orientation & Training

Au Pair Academy

All au pairs attend an orientation program at AuPairCare’s Au Pair Academy in New Jersey (close to New York City) upon arrival in the United States. You will receive training on childcare and child safety, learn about American culture and adapting to your new household, and have the chance to meet other au pairs from around the world.

Attendance at all sessions of the Au Pair Academy orientation is required in order to fulfill the requirements of the au pair program as defined by the United States Department of State.

You will need to speak and understand English throughout Au Pair Academy. All instructions and conversation are in English. Practice your English as much as possible before arriving.

You will be given very specific instructions before you leave your home country about Au Pair Academy, how you get there from the airport, etc. If you have any questions, call your local overseas partner agency office.

The orientation is held at the Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel, close to New York City. The hotel has wonderful amenities, including a comfortable lounge to visit with other au pairs, restaurant, and pool. All classes are held onsite, and all au pairs stay at the hotel. For more details about the location of the Au Pair Academy, visit the hotel website. (http://www.sheratonmeadowlandshotel.com/)

Overview

The Au Pair Academy orientation staff will greet you when you arrive at the Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel. They will give you important orientation materials, instructions on checking into your room, your au pair roommates, and information regarding meals.

On your first day of class (Tuesday), you will also bring your completed Pre-Departure Orientation project to the instructors and use it throughout class.

During Au Pair Academy orientation, classes begin at 8:00 a.m. and end at 5:00 p.m. each day. You may be tired and jet-lagged, but your attendance and full attention is required during all sessions. Your job starts when you arrive at Au Pair Academy, so come ready to learn and participate!

The instructors are trained not only in child development and child safety, but also in how to address the cultural differences and challenges you will face during your year in the United States. It is important that you come prepared to listen and participate because your training will prepare you to settle smoothly into your new family and childcare responsibilities.

Throughout Au Pair Academy, you will receive instruction on child safety and development, American culture, and your new role as an au pair in an American household. You will also have
the opportunity to learn and practice CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation) during a training session. We want you to be prepared to provide the best childcare possible for your host family.

Although the majority of your time at Au Pair Academy will be devoted to the training schedule, you will have some evening free time to enjoy nearby New York City. Our staff will assist you with options on how you can best explore the city during your free time, including an optional tour of New York City.

For your safety, you must follow the rules of the Au Pair Academy staff. You may not change rooms, you must be in the hotel by curfew each night, and you may not bring anyone to your room that is not part of the orientation program. If you have any problems or concerns, please speak to the Au Pair Academy staff.

At the end of the orientation, the Au Pair Academy staff will arrange and pay for transportation to your new home. They will provide you with your flight details, information on airport security, and luggage regulations. If your host family is picking you up at the hotel, the staff will be there with you to greet your family. Please follow all instructions and make sure you are on time for whatever arrangements are made. Make sure you bring all luggage with you when you depart.

### General Curriculum

Most au pairs will follow the general curriculum at Au Pair Academy. The schedule as of June 2009 is as follows. Times and topics may be adjusted in the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>All Day</th>
<th>Arrivals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>8:00 - 10:00</td>
<td>Welcome, Introduction, Job Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>10:00 - 10:15</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:15 - 11:00</td>
<td>Your Area Director, Au Pair Café/Blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:00 - 12:00</td>
<td>American Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:00 - 1:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:00 - 4:00</td>
<td>Infant Stages of Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Includes Infant Bathing and Feeding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:00 - 4:30</td>
<td>Caring for Siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:30 - 5:00</td>
<td>Pre-Departure Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:00</td>
<td>Class Adjourns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:30 - 10:00</td>
<td>New York City Bus Tour (Optional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>8:00 - 8:15</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>8:15 - 10:00</td>
<td>You and Your Host Family, When Problems Come Up, Lessons Learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:00 - 10:15</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:15 - 12:00</td>
<td>First Aid/CPR Overview and Practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Infant Specialized Care Curriculum

AuPairCare offers a special training program for au pairs who will be caring for newborn babies called the Infant Specialized Care Program. Infant Specialized au pairs attend a separate training program devoted to baby care and infant development.

AuPairCare's Infant Specialized Care program uses a hands-on approach to train au pairs in infant safety, care giving, infant stimulation and development. Infant Specialized au pairs attend a certification course in infant CPR and First Aid by the American Heart Association. They also receive instruction from AuPairCare trainers certified in Infant Massage with the Liddle Kidz™ Foundation, as well as trainers certified in Infant Sign language by Baby Fingers, a leading Infant Sign Language learning organization.

Au pairs participating in this program receive four days of orientation and training in infant care and development. This hands-on training is a separate program from the standard training, lasts an additional day, and is conducted in a separate room designed to simulate an American baby's nursery.

Infant Specialized Care training topics include:

- General household safety & hygiene
- Communicating with parents about infant care
- Infant care basics (feeding, bathing, changing, transportation...)
- What to do in an emergency
- Infant stages of development
- Games and activities to stimulate infant mental development
- Baby massage & infant soothing techniques
- Infant Sign Language
- Coping techniques to handle stress as an infant caregiver

Outside of class time, Infant Specialized au pairs have the chance to socialize with all of the au pairs who attend the general curriculum.
Host families who have an infant may opt to have you participate in the *Infant Specialized Care* training program. When you match with a family, you will know if you are expected to attend the *Infant Specialized Care* training program. If you have questions about this program, please contact your local overseas partner agency office for more information.

The Infant Specialized curriculum as of June 2009 is as follows. It may be updated in the future, so please refer to the schedule provided when you arrive to *Au Pair Academy*.

| Day 1  | Monday             | 8:00 - 11:00 pm | Arrivals |
| Day 2  | Tuesday            | 8:00 - 10:00    | Welcome  |
|        |                    |                  | Introduction |
|        |                    | 10:00 - 10:15    | Break |
|        |                    | 10:15 - 11:00    | Your Area Director |
|        |                    |                  | *Au Pair Café Blog* |

**Infant Specialized au pairs leave the General Session to attend a separate Infant Specialized training through Friday.**

| 11:00 - 12:00 | Communicating with Host Parents |
| 12:00 - 1:00  | Lunch |
| 1:00 - 1:30   | Infant Stages of Development |
| 1:30 - 2:30   | General Household Safety/Physical Safety |
| 2:30 - 3:30   | Feeding |
| 3:30 - 3:45   | Break |
| 3:45 - 4:30   | Changing |
| 4:30 – 5:00   | Infant Sign Language |
| 5:00 – 5:30   | Homework Assignment |

| Day 3  | Wednesday           | 8:00 - 8:15     | Introduction |
|        |                    | 8:15 – 8:30     | *Pre-Departure Projects* (bring your project to use throughout the day.) |
|        |                    | 8:30 - 9:15     | Review “Quiz Show” |
|        |                    | 9:15 - 10:00    | Ailments & medications |
|        |                    | 10:00 - 10:15   | Break |
|        |                    | 10:15 - 12:00   | Infant CPR Certification/First Aid |
|        |                    | 12:00 - 1:00    | Lunch |
|        |                    | 1:00 - 3:00     | Infant CPR Certification/First Aid |
|        |                    | 3:00 - 3:15     | Break |
|        |                    | 3:15 - 4:00*    | Infant CPR Certification/First Aid |
|        |                    | 4:00 - 5:00     | Massage |
|        |                    | 5:00 - 5:30     | Homework Assignment |

<p>| Day 4  | Thursday            | 8:00 - 8:30    | Intro |
|        |                    | 8:30 - 9:00    | Review Scenarios |
|        |                    | 9:00 - 9:30    | Baby Routines |
|        |                    | 9:30 - 10:00   | Bathing |
|        |                    | 10:00 - 10:15  | Break |
|        |                    | 10:15 – 10:45  | Bathing, continued |
|        |                    | 10:45 - 11:30  | Comforting Baby/Sleeping |
|        |                    | 11:30 - 12:00  | Developmental Activities |
|        |                    | 12:00 – 1:00   | Lunch |
|        |                    | 1:00 - 1:30    | More Developmental Activities |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:30 – 3:00</td>
<td>Transportation/Driving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 - 3:15</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 – 4:15</td>
<td>Infant Massage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15 - 5:00</td>
<td>Travel Logistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 – 5:30</td>
<td>Homework Assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00 – 9:00</td>
<td>Intro &amp; “A Baby’s Day” Review (Final Review)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 – 9:30</td>
<td>Managing Multiples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 – 10:00</td>
<td>Dealing with Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 – 10:15</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<td>10:15- 11:00</td>
<td>When Problems Come Up &amp; Personal Choices</td>
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<td>11:00 – 11:30</td>
<td>Meeting Your Host Family</td>
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<td>11:30 – 12:00</td>
<td>Tool Kit, Key Point Review &amp; Questions</td>
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<td>12:00 – 1:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>1:00 – 5:00</td>
<td>Departure</td>
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**Day 5 Friday**

8:00 – 9:00: Intro & “A Baby’s Day” Review (Final Review)
9:00 – 9:30: Managing Multiples
9:30 – 10:00: Dealing with Stress
10:00 – 10:15: Break
10:15 – 11:00: When Problems Come Up & Personal Choices
11:00 – 11:30: Meeting Your Host Family
11:30 – 12:00: Tool Kit, Key Point Review & Questions
12:00 – 1:00: Lunch
1:00 – 5:00: Departure
Your First Days with Your Host Family

When your host family picks you up at *Au Pair Academy* or at the airport once you fly to their hometown, you will know that your au pair adventure is really about to start. This is the moment you have been looking forward to. It may be both exciting and scary at the same time. That’s OK—everyone in your new community is excited to welcome you, including your host family, your Area Director, and the other AuPairCare au pairs who live nearby.

**Arrive at your New Home**

During the *Au Pair Academy* the instructors will talk about what to do when you meet your host family for the first time. You will most likely be nervous and excited, but remember that they are eager to meet you and make you feel at home.

If you are not a native English speaker, you may be afraid to speak English. Perhaps you are worried that you will make mistakes. This is normal. Your host family understands that this is part of the process. Challenge yourself and try your best! And always remember to smile! It truly is the international language.

Once you arrive in your host family’s home and community, it will take some time for you to feel completely comfortable there. Give yourself time to adjust. It is normal for you to feel tired and disoriented for the first few days. One parent (or another responsible adult) is required to stay at home for the first three days after your arrival to assist with your transition. Take advantage of those first few days to rest and get to know your new home-- it will not be long before both parents may be back to work and you are responsible for the children.

**Meet AuPairCare’s Local Support**

Your Area Director will be a resource for you throughout your year in the United States. You can always contact her with questions, concerns, problems, or if you start to experience culture shock. If you are having a problem, either personal or work-related, your Area Director will be happy to listen, share insights, give advice and assist you in any way possible. It's best to call or email your Area Director when problems are small and just beginning so you can work together to address them before they feel big and overwhelming.

Your Area Director will call you sometime during your first two days at your host family's home to make sure that you are settling in well. She will introduce herself and answer any questions you may have. She will also schedule a time to meet in person with you and your host family within two weeks of your arrival. Your Area Director will also help you get in touch with other au pairs in the area and tell you when the next au pair monthly activity will be held.

If you do not hear from your local coordinator within three days after you arrive at your host family's home, please call your Regional Manager.

Throughout your program, your Area Director will talk with you at least monthly to provide support and advice. At any time, you can reach out to her with any questions or concerns. You do not need to wait for the monthly check-in phone call to ask for help or assistance.
Settle In

When you arrive at your host family’s home, it may feel like there are a million things to do all at once. There is certainly a lot to learn about your new family, children, responsibilities and community. Over the years, though, AuPairCare has found that there are some things that really do need to be handled in your first few days with your host family. Others can wait and be addressed within the first few weeks of living in your new home.

In the few days of your stay with your host family, you should:

- Play with the children and visit with the host family as much as possible.
  - You may feel shy or homesick, but spending time with your new host family will help you bond with them and become comfortable more quickly than if you spend your free time alone in your room.

- Ask to be shown around the local neighborhood.
  - Ask how to find the grocery store, bank, post office, library, and local parks.
  - Ask how to get from the host family home to specific sites where you’ll need to take the children: school, lessons, playgrounds, etc.
  - Familiarize yourself with your new surroundings and don’t be afraid to ask questions.

- Set up a time to talk with your host parents about any questions that came up during Au Pair Academy about their children, disciplinary approach, or household.

- Ask your host parents to provide a tour of how everything works in their home.
  - How do the house keys and locks work?
  - Is there a house or car alarm? If so, how should you use it?
  - How do the dishwasher, washer and dryer, garage door opener, and stove work?
  - What child-proofing efforts do you need to use to keep their children safe?
  - If they have a pool, what do you need to know about how to use it safely?

- Ask your host parents about “house rules.”
  - Your host family may have guidelines about house guests, television viewing, computer usage, car usage, or a variety of things. Ask them if they have any rules they would like you to follow while you are living with them.

- Set up a time for a weekly meeting with your host parents.
  - This will be a time when you can both share challenges and successes, ask questions and set goals for the coming week.
  - Set this time up now so that you and your host family set the habit of reserving time each week to communicate about successes and areas where you can both contribute to a more successful experience.
  - This may also be the time each week when your host family pays your stipend.

- Make copies of your documents and keep them in a safe place at your new home.
  - If you lose these documents, it is very hard to replace them. Having copies of them will make them easier to replace.
  - Do not walk around with your visa, DS 2019, Social Security Card, or passport. Do keep emergency phone numbers, your International Driver’s License, your insurance card and the medical release form in your wallet.
In the first few weeks of your stay with your host family, you should:

☐ Apply for your Social Security Number
  - It is very important that you apply for your Social Security Number (SSN) card as soon as possible after your first 14 days in the United States. It can take up to two weeks to receive your social security card after you apply. Your SSN will make it easier for you to open a bank account, register for classes, and apply for your state driver’s license. Your host family will need this number for their taxes.
  - To find the nearest office, search the online Social Security Office Locator. Your Area Director can help you find the most convenient local locations. Make sure you bring all of the following documents to the office:
    - Passport
    - Visa
    - DS2019 form
    - 1-94 form
    - The AuPairCare letter addressed to the Social Security Office (This letter is included in the packet you receive at Au Pair Academy.)
  - Once you receive your Social Security Card, keep it in a safe place. Do not carry it with you every day.
  - For further information about the Social Security Card, refer to the “My Official Documents” section of this handbook.

☐ Open a checking account at a local bank after you receive your Social Security Card.
  - Banks are typically open from 9:00am to 4:00pm, Monday through Friday. Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) offer you access to your accounts 24 hours a day. ATMs associated with your bank are typically free, but you will pay a fee to use ATMs operated by other banks.
  - Your bank card from home will likely work in ATMs in the United States, but you should check with your home bank before you travel to the United States. Remember, you will probably be charged a fee to use an ATM outside of your home country, so check with your bank before using your ATM card in the U.S.
  - Banks offer a variety of services—mainly checking accounts and savings accounts. Before choosing a bank, ask your Area Director to recommend banks that offer “no fee” checking accounts.
  - To open a checking or savings account, you will need a Social Security Number and your passport. Once you have your account, you will need to show photo identification when writing a check. It’s best to get your State Driver’s License or State Identification Card for this purpose so that you don’t carry your passport with you every day.
  - Throughout your program year, keep a minimum of $500 in the bank as an emergency fund in case of unexpected medical expenses or travel expenses.

☐ Apply for your state driver’s license or identification card.
  - Having a U.S. government photo identification will make it easier for you to register for classes, get a library card, and set up a bank account. You should apply for either a driver’s license or a state photo ID card.
  - Some states do not recognize an International Driving Permit (IDP) as a valid driver license and may require that you get your license within 90 days of arrival. Check with your Area Director to find out the laws in your state. If you need a state drivers’ license, your host family can also help you with the process.
  - If you will be driving as an au pair:
    - Make time to practice driving and study the state driving laws closely soon after your arrival. You can pick up a copy of the drivers’ instruction manual at the local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office or download it from your local state’s DMV website. Search online to find out your closest DMV office here.
You will need to make two appointments at the DMV: one for the written test and one for the driving test. When you go to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) for your tests, bring:
- Your Social Security Card
- Your passport
- Your DS-2019 form
- Your glasses (or wear contacts) if you have them
- Your International Drivers’ License (if you have one)

☐ Get a library card for the local library.
  - You can check out books, movies and CDs for free. You will also be able to take your host children to the library for story time and other events. You’ll need your State Driver’s License or Identification Card to apply for your library card.

☐ Sign up for classes.
  - Don’t postpone this! You need to take a total of 60 class hours (or 6 credits) this year. It is important to begin the classes early, especially if you might want to extend your program. Even if your classes don’t start immediately, go ahead and register for them within the first few weeks of your arrival. Your Area Director can help you with this task. Be sure to talk with your host family about the scheduling and transportation logistics before you register for your classes.

☐ Call your health insurance company. Ask them to provide the name and phone number of a doctor who is a Preferred Provider in your area.
  - It is best to have the name, phone number, and address of a doctor even if you are healthy. That way, you know who to call if you do get sick. Tell your family who your doctor is in case they need to use that information on your behalf.

☐ Talk about your vacation time with your family.
  - Find out if there are times they would prefer that you use (or don’t use) your vacation. Tell your host family now if there are specific times you know you’d like to take vacation (e.g. a family wedding, travel home for Christmas, etc.). You will earn one paid vacation day per month starting in your third month.

☐ If you know you’ll need to travel internationally during your program year, send your DS 2019 form to AuPairCare’s San Francisco office to be signed for travel.

If you can accomplish all of these items, you’ll be well on your way to settling in smoothly. Even after your first few weeks, you may not feel totally settled, but you will have built the groundwork for participating in the community and your host family in a way that will help you achieve the goals you have for your au pair program year. What a sense of accomplishment.

Improving Your English

You must always speak in English during your program. If English is not your first language, you may be uncomfortable with your skills, and even feel embarrassed, but you will quickly notice that people will correct your mistakes in a positive way. Your English abilities will improve through your mistakes. Everyone will admire you for your willingness and desire to improve.

The worst mistake you can make is to keep silent. If you do not talk, your host parents may think you are incapable of performing your job. They understand that English may be challenging for you, and they will understand your efforts to practice and improve it.

Practice and repetition are the only ways you will improve your English skills. Additionally, if you only speak in your native language, you will isolate yourself from everyone else who cannot speak your language. Because English is spoken by everyone around you, speaking English will
enable you to make friends with people from many cultures. These friendships are one of the most rewarding elements of the au pair program.

**Commit to your host family**

The au pair tradition is different from most other childcare arrangements because you are a member of your host family. Your host family is excited about this, and they are counting on you to become an engaged, dependable and loving member of their family for the whole year.

To be a successful au pair, you must enter into the world of your new family. Surround yourself with your family's culture, activities, and lifestyle. Take your responsibilities seriously and always communicate.

You have made an important decision in coming to a foreign country and spending a year with a new family. There will be days when you are very happy with your decision. However, there may also be days when you are not. Remember that being dissatisfied at times is a normal part of "culture shock." It will pass with patience and understanding.

It is very important that you understand the serious commitment you have made to your host family. They have welcomed you into their home and entrusted you with the care of their most precious part of their life—their children. They have planned their daily lives around your commitment to stay for a complete program year, and you have promised to fulfill this commitment.

AuPairCare asks that you give this commitment your very best effort. Learn to be open-minded. Ask as many questions as you need to. Voice your concerns or questions with your host family or Area Director before problems become overwhelming. As with your natural family and your friends back home, you will need to work through some challenges together in order to build a strong relationship.

The payoff at the end of your year will be worth it. As au pairs finally leave for home, they always say that they could never have predicted how attached they would become to their host children, their host parents, and the friends they made during their time in the United States. That experience is waiting for you if you are willing to commit to it.
Life with your Host Family

Your host family will try to clearly explain their family routine and their childcare needs so that you know what is expected of you from the very beginning. As you learn to live together, you will also learn what your host family expects of you as a family member who is respectful of the household rules.

Schedule

You can expect your host family to plan a standing weekly schedule stating the days and hours of your childcare work schedule. They will list activities and duties that they would like you to perform during these work hours. They will let you know what needs to be done in the mornings (dressing, feeding, driving to school, tidying children’s rooms, doing the children’s laundry), at lunchtime (healthy meals), and in the afternoons (naptime, arts & crafts, outings, exercise, snacks, and limited TV time.)

They will be sure to designate a complete free weekend each month for you (Friday evening - Monday morning). Your host family can change this schedule when necessary, but they will try to give you a consistent schedule so that you can make plans for your classes and free time.

When you are not officially working, you are welcome to spend additional time with your host family. You do not need to withdraw to your own private space or be out of the house. However, if you need a break from the busy household, your host parents will understand. Your family may also let you know their regular dinner hours and what regular activities they participate in. If they plan specific family activities in which they would like you to join, they will let you know.

House Rules

Your host parents will write down the important house rules for you, which you need to respect. You are a member of their family, and every family has rules that help the family live together happily. Your host parents may establish rules regarding:

- chores
- telephone use
- phone messages
- noise levels
- use of the TV
- internet and computer use
- personal hygiene
- curfew and/ or “check in phone calls”
- socializing in their home or when you go out
- drinking alcohol (by U.S. law, you must be least 21 years old)
Typical house rules may take the following into account:

**Telephone use**

The host parents will explain to you their telephone billing system, their rules for use of the phone (for both you and the children), and any phone restrictions. They may write a contract regarding the family’s telephone policy because you are responsible for paying for the long-distance and international phone calls you make. The contract might include the amount of allowable long distance calls and how you will pay for the phone bill.

AuPairCare highly recommends that you use telephone calling cards for all long distance and international calls, or Skype for free international calls. If you use calling cards, your calls will be less expensive and it will be easier to track your spending. AuPairCare has partnered with ekit Communication Services to provide host families and au pairs with international calling cards. For more information on how to save on international calls, contact ekit online at www.aupaircare.ekit.com or by telephone at 1-800-310-4168. Neither AuPairCare nor your host family is responsible for the cost of your phone usage.

If you are able to use a cell phone, track your usage of minutes very carefully. Au pairs can run into issues with unexpectedly high phone bills due to high cell phone usage in their first months on the program. You don’t want to find that you unexpectedly owe $500 in cell phone bills—that’s nearly three weeks’ worth of your weekly stipend! Instead, use Skype for free unlimited international calling with friends and family back home.

Remember that you must always reserve your personal phone calls for non-working hours. It is not appropriate to have long phone conversations while also caring for your host family’s children. During your working hours, you should be totally focused on the children.

For specific instructions on how to place a phone call, refer to the “Your New Country” section of this handbook.

**Curfew**

A curfew is the hour or time when your host family expects you to be home after an evening out. Please be prepared to discuss this with your host family soon after your arrival. You are an adult, but you are also a guest in your host family’s home. Your host parents may worry about you when you are out until they know you have arrived home safely, just like any parent would. Plan to be in early during the first few weeks.

Your evenings out can not affect your readiness to work the next day. Many host families ask their au pairs to be home in time to get 8 hours of sleep before beginning their work day. Most host families have an earlier curfew if the au pair is using the family car.

If you will be late, always call your host family. Host parents will worry about you if they expect you home and you do not return on time. Remember that no matter when you get home, it is your responsibility to be awake and alert and fully engaged with the children during childcare hours the next day.

**Socializing**

Your host family may set guidelines about socializing in their home. You should discuss with your host family whether or not they will allow you to entertain in their home and how late your friends
can stay if you are allowed to entertain in their home. Most host families do not permit overnight guests.

During your working hours, you can never host friends at your host family’s home, go out with friends, or meet up with friends unless the focus of the group activity is the children for whom you are all caring and your host parents have given you permission for that specific activity.

**Transportation and car use**

Your Area Director will discuss with your host family the importance of making some kind of transportation available to you. This may be in the form of using public transportation, driving the family car, or getting rides from them. Your host family is not responsible for the cost of transportation during non-working hours.

Some host families allow their au pair to use their family’s car. Not all host families do so, nor must they do so. Please respect your host family’s decision regarding use of their car.

If your host family does allow you to use their car, they will want to specify ground rules for when you can use the car, limitations of where you can drive the car and if you can have passengers, safety guidelines for driving the children and friends, and paying for gas. Using your host family’s car is a privilege you must continue to earn and appreciate throughout your year. One instance of poor judgment while using the family car will likely results in your loss of access to the car.

If your host family allows you to drive their car, they will need to add you to their insurance policy and create guidelines for use of the car. It is often expensive for them to insure you as a driver, so take your responsibility as a driver seriously.

**Stay Focused**

The stakes are high when you are driving the family car, so drive carefully:

- Never, ever leave children in the car alone. This is a serious crime in the United States because it is extremely dangerous for the children. A car can quickly become too hot or cold for a child, causing serious harm or even death.
- All occupants must wear a seat belt at all times; this is the law. Always double-check the straps on car seats, booster seats and seatbelts.
- American cars are some of the widest cars in the world. Try to remember that when pulling in and out of car spots and garages. Be especially careful when you are backing out in reverse.
- Be especially careful in parking lots. Advance or reverse slowly, and try to refrain from talking to the children or other passengers until you are out of the parking lot.
- Always pay very close attention when driving. If children or passengers in the car require your attention, find a safe place to pull over to attend to their needs. For example, do not turn around to pass a toy to a child.
- Until you are used to driving here, keep the radio turned off. Keep conversation to a minimum.
- In many states, it is illegal to use a cell phone while driving. Regardless of the laws in your state, your host family will likely not want you to answer your phone, talk on a cell phone (even with a headset) or text while in the car.

**Respect your Use of the Family’s Car**

To show your host parents that you appreciate the use of their car you can:

- Make sure you are the only person who ever drives the car—not your friends.
• Be especially careful to respect your curfew when you have the family car.
• Tell your host family immediately if you think there may be something wrong with the car.
• If you receive a parking ticket or a "moving violation," tell them immediately and pay the fines quickly.
• Never allow anyone to smoke in the car. AuPairCare is a non-smoking program, and host families have specifically chosen you because you will not be exposing their children to second-hand smoke. You are not allowed to smoke even when off-duty.
• Never allow anyone to drink alcohol in the car. Having an open container of alcohol in a car is illegal in the United States and is a very serious offense. Even if it belongs to a passenger in the car, you as the driver may lose your license and be arrested by the police.
• Never drink and drive. Call your host family if you have been drinking and can no longer drive. Remember that it doesn't take much to reach the legal alcohol limit. Instead, do not drink any alcohol if you plan to drive.
• Bring the car home with gas when you use it for personal use. Ask your host parents what type of gas the car uses. By law, all cars in the U.S. use unleaded gas. Very few use diesel gas.

If You Have a Car Accident

1. Find out if anyone is injured. If someone requires medical attention, dial 911 from any phone. 911 is the free direct number for emergency services with the local police anywhere in the U.S.

2. If possible, do not move your car until the police arrive and have assessed the accident. While waiting for the police, exchange the following information with the driver of the other car:
   • Name, telephone number and license ID number.
   • License plate number, model and year of the car.
   • Registration number and expiration date.
   • Name of the insurance company and policy number.

   If anyone saw the accident, ask to write down their names, telephone number and address in the event of insurance problems.

3. If the children are in the car with you, call the host parents immediately after ensuring everyone is OK, calling the police and collecting information from the other driver and witnesses.

If you hit a parked car, you must leave your name, phone number and license plate number on a piece of paper and put it under the windshield wiper, so they may contact you. Also write down the car’s license number and model of the car. Failure to leave your information or report the accident is considered a crime.

If you are involved in an accident resulting in damage to the car, you must pay for the first $250 of any damage. Always tell your host family immediately if you have been involved in any type of accident or received a ticket while using the family car. If you have been in an accident that damaged either car, you must call the police to file a police report before you leave the scene of the accident.

If you are in an accident while driving the family car, your host parents may have to pay a significant amount as an insurance deductible, increased insurance fees, and replacement or
rental car costs. Undoubtedly, they will be frustrated and very concerned about the safety of their children. In some cases, this concern for their children’s safety in the car with their au pair can lead to the family breaking the match with their au pair.

Your host family’s rules are the rules that matter

As you meet other au pairs in your area, you will see that every family has a unique schedule and set of “house rules” in place. You will need to respect the guidelines and expectations that your host family has created, and not compare them with those in place for au pairs in other host family households. Just as cultures are different, families are different from one another. The guidelines that your host family creates will help to ensure that together you and your host family can build the trust and open communication that will lead to a wonderful year together.

Your Role as a Family Member

You have joined your host family not only as the caregiver for their children, but also as a member of their family. With that in mind, engage and participate in family life fully:

- Spend as much time as you can with your host family, especially when you first arrive.
- Show the family and children that you care about them. Ask “What can I do to help?”
- Share your culture. Talk about your country, teach the kids some of your language, songs, and games, and prepare some foods from your country.
- Join your family for meals when you can. Offer to help with cooking and cleanup.
- Participate in social events with your family because you are part of this family, not just because you’re working. Join in, talk, and help out! Attend family events such as holidays, birthday parties, and special celebrations.
- When you go out for dinner with your host parents and you are not working, you should still help. You can help the kids when their food comes, help entertain the kids while they are waiting, take turns taking them to the bathroom if they need to go, help them clean up afterwards, and make sure to thank your host parents for taking you out to dinner.

As a member of the family, also try to provide a good role model for the children:

- Having good hygiene is very important, and U.S. customs may be different from those in your home country. Be sure to shower daily, wear deodorant daily, brush your teeth twice daily and launder your clothing regularly.
- Set a good example for the children: make your bed daily, clean your room weekly, keep your clothes picked up, and make sure your personal items don’t clutter the shared space.
- Keep the bathroom you use clean. Clean this bathroom twice weekly.
- Keep your bedroom clean and tidy. Clean and vacuum it weekly.
- Do not bring items that belong to the family into your private space unless you have asked specifically for permission to do so.
- Keep the car clean and neat, and bring it home with gas.
Your Financial Life

Your Weekly Stipend

The weekly stipend your host family has agreed to pay you is determined by the United States Department of State. Your weekly stipend will be $195.75. Your host parents will establish a time each week when they will pay you. This may be during your weekly check-in meeting with them. You may receive the stipend as either cash or a check, which you will need to either deposit or cash at your bank.

Create a Plan

When you set financial goals, you develop a life skill that will last beyond your au pair program year. If you learn to manage your money you will have financial freedom that you can truly enjoy.

There are four easy steps to managing your money:

- **Get your Social Security card**

- **Open a bank account**
  - Find a bank that offers no-fee accounts. Your Area Director can help you.
  - If you don’t have a lot of cash to deposit in the bank when you open your account, operate on a cash basis until you have roughly $200 in savings.
  - Remember that when your host parents give you a check, it could take several days to “clear” before you could take that cash out of your account. If you try to take the money out of the bank account before your check “clears,” you may be have to pay expensive “insufficient funds” penalty fees.

- **Determine a savings plan**
  - **First pay yourself.** Set aside a nice portion of your stipend for yourself to enjoy as you want— for outings with friends, shopping and souvenirs, and transportation costs such as train fare or gas for the family car when you use it on your personal time.
  - **Once you have paid yourself, you should save the rest in your bank account.** Be sure to put money in the bank for taxes, phone bills, additional coursework expenses, unexpected expenses like a medical or dental visit, travel funds, and savings to bring back home at the end of your au pair program.
  - **AuPairCare highly recommends that au pairs keep a minimum of $500 in their bank account at all times as an “emergency fund.”**
  - **Many au pairs choose to spend a third of their stipend (roughly $65 per week) and save two-thirds (roughly $130 per week.)** Your host family may be willing to help you save by paying you your weekly “spending money” in cash and your “savings” via check so you can easily deposit it in the bank.

- **Be disciplined about making your bank deposit every week**
  - Don’t let cash build up at home, or you will be tempted to spend it!
Spend Wisely

With a little effort, you can stretch your spending money. Here are a few ideas:

- Buy used instead of new items
  - Craigslist sells used items available locally ([www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com))
  - Freecycle organizes people who give items away for free ([www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org))
  - Check your local newspaper for weekend “garage sales,” where local neighbors sell their used items at very low prices to help declutter their homes

- Find the local dollar store
  - Most communities have a store where nearly all items sell for just $1! The selection can be limited, but this is a great place to find basic toiletries and fun party supplies.

- Sign up for a Student Advantage discount card
  - This card enables you to receive discounts at participating local stores and websites ([http://www.studentadvantage.com/discountcard/](http://www.studentadvantage.com/discountcard/))

- Sign up for local stores’ loyalty programs
  - Nearly all supermarkets, drugstores, and many other stores offer “loyalty programs” you can join. Simply fill out a simple form, and you’ll receive a special card that will give you great discounts when you shop there.

- Save money on international phone calls:
  - Make your international calls for free using Skype ([http://www.skype.com/](http://www.skype.com/))

- Save money when dining at restaurants:
  - Watch for special deals at local restaurants such as “Happy Hours,” where early diners often receive major savings.
  - If you have a credit card, sign up for a restaurant savings program such as Rewards Network ([http://www.rewardsnetwork.com/](http://www.rewardsnetwork.com/)) or Restaurant.com ([http://www.restaurant.com](http://www.restaurant.com)). Try to go to participating restaurants when you go out with friends.

- Use your official Student Identification Card for discounts at many businesses, movie theaters, and museums.
  - You can ask for a card at the college where you enroll for your coursework to fulfill the educational requirement.

Respect the Program Limitations

Remember that the Department of State specifically does not allow au pairs to earn extra money by working beyond the 45 hours of childcare as an au pair. Your visa does not allow you to work for pay other than your official au pair duties. This is to ensure that you have the time to focus on your education and to explore American culture.

Regardless of what you see other au pairs in your community doing, it is never acceptable to:

- Work extra hours for your host family for additional pay beyond your weekly stipend. (For example, you cannot “babysit” on a Saturday night for set hourly wage in addition to your weekly stipend.)
- Work extra hours babysitting for pay for other families in your community.
- Accept additional paid work, such as work at a local gym, shop or as a language tutor.

Your host family has agreed to specific costs associated with hosting you as an au pair. Please respect these limits, and do not ask your host family to borrow money from them. Likewise, your host family will not ask you to loan them funds.
Sending Money Home

Every year participants on our programs work hard, save as much money as possible and then wonder how they can get it home safely. We urge you never to carry large amounts of cash. We want to make sure that you hold on to your hard-earned savings. Please do not carry your savings in cash!

If you have a bank account in your home country, you should be able to transfer money to it fairly easily especially if it is a U.S. dollar account. The transfer usually costs you $30 and may take 3-4 weeks to appear in your account at home. In most countries your bank will charge between 0.5-1% of the total sum to withdraw cash from the account.

Alternatively, you may find it convenient to buy traveler’s checks. It is a safe way to carry money, you can use what you need as you travel and changing them back into cash at home is relatively easy. There are some fees involved in converting traveler’s checks to cash in your home country. In some places it is as low as 1%.

International postal money orders may also be a good option for some participants. The fee varies depending on the destination country and is usually between $3 and $8.50 per money order. Each money order can be a maximum of $700 and there is no limit to how many can be sent in a given time period. International postal money orders are generally issued in U.S. dollars and then converted into local currency at the time they are cashed according to the current exchange rate. Most large post offices should be able to offer this service.

If you open a U.S. bank account during your program, it is also possible to leave it open and use your ATM card to withdraw money as you travel as well as after you return home. Most ATM cards can now be used internationally. There may be ATM fees that vary from country to country but this still may be a good option for you. It is also easy for you to close your account by mail after returning home.
Your Job as Childcare Provider

Professionalism

As an au pair, you have decided to perform one of the most important jobs in the world-- taking care of children! As many parents will tell you, it is one of the most rewarding, but also the most challenging jobs in the world. Keep in mind that when you signed on to the Au Pair program, you signed up for a very important job and AuPairCare and your host family expect you to take this job very seriously.

AuPairCare and your host family chose you because we think you understand the importance of this role, have the ability to thrive in this role, and expect you to dedicate 100% of your efforts to this role when you are working.

To excel in your role as an au pair:

- **Be ready for work when your day begins.**
  - "Ready for work" means you are out of bed, showered, dressed, have eaten breakfast, and you are greeting your host parents five minutes before your start time to get your instructions for the day.
  - Make eye contact and smile when you say "good morning" to your host parents and host children. Don’t wait for them to say it first.

- **Always be on-time.**
  - Americans take this very seriously—you need to be on time for starting work, picking up the kids, taking the kids to school, getting the kids to bed, having their meals on time, and arriving back home before your curfew. Being on time is a great way to show your host parents that they can trust you.
  - Make reminders for yourself if you need to and write down tasks and timing.
  - Ask your host family to write out a specific daily schedule for you.

- **During your 45 working hours, focus only on your au pair duties.**
  - During the 45 hours of your workweek, focus only on childcare and child-related household tasks. Activities that need to wait until you are off-duty include: watching TV, spending time in your room, showering, letter writing, personal reading, personal phone calls, using the internet and writing e-mails, or personal chores such as personal laundry or tidying up your own room. You cannot have social visitors during your work hours.

- **Use discretion.**
  - Remember, each family is different— in some ways better, and in some ways not. You need to use discretion regarding what you tell others about situations in your home. Never compare your host family situation with another au pair’s host family. Be careful not to gossip with other au pairs about your host family.
  - If you are experiencing a problem or the program rules are not being followed, you should call your Area Director to discuss it rather than discussing it with friends or others.

- **Ask questions.**
  - Your host parents would much rather have you ask questions repeatedly rather than guess how they want you to handle specific childcare questions or household duties. If in doubt, simply ask—your host parents won’t mind!
Your Childcare Responsibilities

Throughout *Au Pair Academy*, you developed a list of questions to discuss with your host family to better understand their needs and expectations for how you will care for their children. Schedule a time to discuss these questions with your host family so that you can ensure that you have a clear understanding of their expectations. Your host parents will talk with you about what types of behavior to encourage for their children, the importance of maintaining their routines, acceptable methods of child discipline, required supervision, forbidden areas in the house or outdoors, and cleaning up. Take notes during this conversation.

You will see that American family life and parenting practices are extremely child centered. Children in the United States are encouraged from an early age to express themselves, take responsibility for their actions and help in the house. Parents believe such an upbringing will help children develop confidence and self-esteem. Your host parents will expect you to align your own childcare style with this “American” approach to caregiving.

As you learn to care for the children and communicate with your host parents about your childcare responsibilities, strive for success in each of these areas:

### Bond with the children

Children of any age can sense someone who is genuinely excited to be with them, so your natural enthusiasm and warmth will help the children bond with you. Children also crave consistency, so pay close attention to how your host parents communicate with their children and establish regular routines and boundaries for them. Remember that it takes about a month for everyone to truly know each other and feel comfortable, so don’t be disappointed if it takes some time for the children to bond with you.

As you establish your relationships with your host family’s children, strive to:

- **Encourage your host children**
  - Help them to be positive and believe they can do things.
- **Be positive, outgoing, and enthusiastic about your work**
  - Children pick up easily on negativity and stress, so your good attitude and enthusiasm will help the children learn that you are a trusted, safe adult in their lives.
- **Play actively instead of watching TV**
  - Children love to be engaged in all sorts of activities. Don’t just watch them play—play with them! Get down on the ground with them. Talk with them at eye level. Dance with them while you are singing to them. Kids need you to be fun, happy, silly, smiley, creative, and playful.
  - Most American families set a limit of how much TV their children can watch—usually a half-hour to one hour per day of age-appropriate programming. Ask your host parents about their TV rules for their children and follow them closely.
- **Get to know each child individually**
  - What are their interests? What were their favorite activities with their last au pair or babysitter?
  - How does each child like his or her food prepared? Hair combed? Toys arranged? Lunch packed? Young children can be very rigid about how they do things. This is their way of setting predictable structure in their days. It enables
them to be comfortable taking risks in other areas in their lives—such as the “risk” of getting used to a new au pair.

- Take care to do things the way the child prefers. Wait until a month after your arrival to suggest changes, as change may make the child more resistant to accepting you. Later the child will really love your ideas.

- **Focus on the children**
  - Children will get upset if you are speaking to your friends and not paying attention to them. At the playground, play with the children rather than chatting with other caregivers. At home, remember that you may not talk with your friends on the phone or use the computer during work hours.

Your host family’s children need to know that you are more than their caregiver. You are truly a part of their family, and they will expect you to “be there for them” just as any other family member is. With that in mind, try to:

- **Be sensitive to the kids during your “off” hours.**
  - They love you whether you are “on” or “off” working hours. You don’t have to do everything with them during your time off, but be gentle when you explain that you have some personal things to attend to.

- **Attend important events for the children if you can,** even if they are not during your official working hours.
  - If you cannot attend, be sure to ask the kids about the events. Ask “How was the soccer game? How did you play?” OR “How was your dance performance? Did you have fun?”

- **Help to celebrate special days in the children’s lives**
  - You don’t need to spend money on gifts, but be sure to make a special card for your host children on their birthday, religious holidays, or their first day of school.

Even with all these efforts to bond with the children, you will have days when your patience is short. Parents do, too. On these days, try to:

- **Understand that the children are testing you** because you are the new au pair
  - It may take some time before the children can truly trust you. During this time, it’s important to stay patient and consistent with the children. They will want to see if you know and create the same structures and boundaries for them that their parents do. You’ll have a much easier time if you are careful to remain consistent with the host parents’ approaches.

- **Accept that kids are not perfect**
  - Children have bad days, make lots of mistakes, and do things incorrectly. When a child is upset or mischievous, try to redirect them to more positive behaviors that they can do rather than simply telling them what they cannot do.

- **Always remember that you are the adult**
  - You need to react to children as an adult. Do not argue back with them like another child. **Do not raise your voice. Do not ever be rough with them.**
  - Kids can say things that are mean. Do not take things your host kids say or do personally. Instead, try to offer them alternate language they can use to express their frustration—“I know you don’t really hate me, although you might not like me very much right now. Are you frustrated that we have to leave the playground?”

- **Be careful not to favor one child**
  - You must treat all the children equally. Showing favoritism can erode your relationship with all family members.
Earn the trust of your host parents

Host parents may be as nervous as you are on the first day you are taking care of the children on your own. Help them learn to trust you by making good decisions and by communicating effectively with them about their children.

Your host parents expect you to:

- Keep their children safe.
  - Always:
    - Keep young children within eyesight—if you can’t see them, you don’t know what is happening with them.
    - Take child-proofing measures seriously. Keep baby gates and cabinets locked, and ask your host parents about other childproofing efforts. If your family has a pool, stay close to the children whenever they are in or near the pool, and ask your family to show you specific pool safety measures.
    - Check that toys and activities that are safe. Those that are safe for an older child may not be safe for a younger child and may create a risk of choking.
  - Never:
    - Leave a child alone at home or in the car—even for a moment. This is a very serious crime in the United States and is extremely dangerous as it can result in the death of the child.
    - Leave a child alone in the bath. Until your host parents tell you their child is old enough to bathe alone, you must stay in the bathroom when children are in the bath or shower. Do not leave to pick out pajamas, answer the phone, or answer the door.
    - Leave the child with another adult, even if the adult is a friend of yours.
    - Open the door to anyone that you do not know unless your host parents tell you to do so ahead of time.
    - Let children go outside alone, even into a fenced back yard.

- Focus on their children and your child-related duties during your working hours.
  - Do not chat on the phone or use the computer while you are caring for the children. Tell your friends and family that you are working and need to talk with them when you are off duty.
  - When you are at the playground with the children, play with the children rather than chatting with other caregivers.

- Respect the “house rules” from the start.
  - Your host parents have carefully defined rule on visitors, use of the car, phone and computer, and curfews. Show your respect for the family by following these rules as a way to build trust with your host parents.

Just as you need to actively build your relationship with the host children, you need to build a relationship with your host parents, too. To do so:

- Help your host parents to get to know you.
  - Tell your host parents as often as you can about fun things you did with their child, and fun things you remember from your own childhood and culture.

- Ask lots of questions about your work.
  - Even if you feel silly asking what seems simple, you really must ask if you have any doubts! It may feel embarrassing to say you don’t understand, but your host parents completely understand that English is probably not your first language.
  - Do not say “yes” when your host parents ask “do you understand?” if you do not understand.
o Ask your host parents to repeat it, show you and write it down. Host parents would much rather explain instructions repeatedly until you understand… rather than not trust you when you claim to understand.

- Over-communicate with your host parents about their children.
  o You are the “eyes and ears” for the host parents. You will hear what the kids say when they come home from school and what they need for the next day. Share all of this information with the host parents every day.

- “Show” your host parents what you do with the children.
  o It is always nice for a parent to see what their children were doing during the day when they had to be away from them.
  o Take pictures of your kids during the day and show them to your host parents in the evening. If you’ve made art projects, completed homework assignments, or built something with the kids’ toys during the day, set them out on the counter for the host parents to see right when they arrive home.

- Accept that American families are different from families in your home country.
  o Ask as many questions about American children—and your own host family’s children—as you need to. Your host parents will appreciate it.
  o Understand that parenting styles differ across cultures, and learn to accept the “American” style of parenting.

Learn to Set Boundaries for the Children

Before your host children and your host parents can fully trust you, you need to learn to provide consistent, age-appropriate discipline. Your disciplinary style must fit with the host parents’ disciplinary style.

You must talk with your family about how to set boundaries for their children, and how to handle it when the children don’t respect those limits. Remember that both your expectations and the consequences for poor behavior need to be age-appropriate. Your disciplinary approach for a one-year old will be quite different from your approach with a six year old.

Regardless of age, the key basis for successful discipline is that children should always know that there will be predictable consequences when they make poor choices.

Physical Punishment is Unacceptable

Physical punishment may be common in other countries, but hitting a child is NOT acceptable under any circumstances in the United States. Never shake a baby or child — serious injury or death could result. Never pick up a child roughly or pull children by the hand if they are resisting walking with you. Never forcibly restrain the child, even if in the context of disciplining. Never pinch or bite the child to “show them what it feels like.”

Physical punishment can not only physically injure the child; it can scare the child and erode the child’s trust in you. It can also cause your host family to end your match with them, and may end your program participation.

Discipline that uses your physical power backfires because it creates a power struggle between you and the child. This power struggle will overshadow the main issue—the child made a poor decision that now has predictable consequences.
“Assertive Discipline”

The “Assertive Discipline” approach is used in many American classrooms for school-age children. This approach uses the idea of baseball, emphasizing that after three strikes “you’re out.” Before using it, discuss it with your host family to ensure that they have input on how you can provide a disciplinary approach that is consistent with their own.

- **Strike 1: Give a verbal warning**
  The child has made a poor choice, and the child’s behavior is unacceptable. You tell the child calmly that the behavior is unacceptable. You also tell the child that if he/she chooses to continue the behavior, the child will lose a valued toy or privilege. For example, “It’s time to share the truck with your brother. Please give it to him, or I will have to put it away until you are ready to share it.”

  For young children, try to distract them or redirect them to a new toy or activity. “Let’s go read a story and we can try again later to share the truck.”

- **Strike 2: Remove a valued toy or privilege**
  You can now take away whatever is at the heart of the poor behavior. Instead, you could take away a specific privilege such as promised TV time. This approach is effective because if the child modifies his/her behavior, the good conduct can be positively reinforced by returning the toy or TV time. For example, “Since you didn’t choose to share the truck with your brother, I have to put it away now. Let me know when you’re ready to share it, and we can take it out again.”

- **Strike 3: “Time Out”**
  If the child continues misbehaving, you notify the child that he/she has neglected two warnings. A predictable consequence follows:
  
  - You call the host parent, or
  - The child is removed from the situation for a “time out.”

  For example, “You’ve chosen to ignore two warnings about sharing and putting your truck away. You need a ‘time out’ to calm yourself down and think about how to make a better choice next time.”

The purpose of a “time out” is to remove the child from the trigger situation (playmates, toy that isn’t shared, etc.) and bring the child to a safe, calm place where the child can focus on regaining control of his emotions and his actions. “Time out” for a young child may mean the child has to sit with the au pair who uses the time to help the child calm himself down, then to explain why the break was needed and how to choose better behavior after the “time out.” An older child may be asked to spend time in his room during the duration of the “time out.” “Time outs” usually last for one minute per year of age, so a 2-year old would have a two minute “time out” and a six year old would have a six-minute “time out.”

Even on a third strike, the child can change his/her behavior and resume play after the child completes the “time out” and apologizes to the appropriate parties. The “time out” is not a punishment, but instead is an opportunity for the child to calm down and make a new, better choice about how to behave.
“Positive Discipline”

Another effective approach is “positive discipline.” Using these steps, you can guide children’s behavior and help them learn to resolve problems in a way that helps them to feel responsible and capable of managing their own behavior.

The steps are:

- Stop the action and interrupt the behavior.
  - “Stop, that isn’t safe. I know you are angry, but you may not hit her.”

- State what you see.
  - “I see you both want the fire truck. We only have one fire truck, but we have two children. Is that what’s happening?”

- Listen to the children’s explanation.
  - Actively listen and try not to judge or interrupt the children.

- Identify the problem and show you understand how the children feel.
  - “You are sad when the fire truck is grabbed from you. And you are mad that he has the truck.”

- Brainstorm solutions.
  - Ask the children “what can we do about this?” rather than telling them what to do.
  - Allow the children to come up with as many ideas as possible. Let the children come up with the solution.
  - Young children may not be able to brainstorm yet, so offer them simple choices. “Do you want to put the truck away, or do you want to take turns?”

- Summarize the solution.
  - Repeat the solution the children agreed to. “OK, you have decided to play with the blocks while you play with the fire truck, then we’ll switch toys soon.”
  - Use as few words as possible, so the children pay attention and understand.

Let Your Host Parents Have the Final Word

If you encounter behavior that you do not feel prepared to handle, you should try to contact the host parents immediately for advice on the best way to handle the situation.

Even if your own family or culture would suggest that you discipline differently from the host parents’ approach, remember that you are caring for the host parents’ children. You will serve the best interests of the children by providing discipline that is consistent with their parents’ approach.
Communicating with your Host Family

Establishing clear, open communication between you and your host family is very important. Everyone will benefit from honest and open communication.

Many au pairs are uncertain of how to address concerns or problems in a foreign culture or language, and so they stay quiet. This creates tension between the au pair and host family. Instead, you should talk with your host family about questions or concerns when they come up.

Your host family knows that it may take time for you to adapt to a new lifestyle, language and customs, as well as their schedule and needs. If your host family asks you to tell them how you feel or to share any questions, speak up. They really do want to know how you are doing and how they can help ease the transition.

Adjust to the “direct” American style

To have a successful au pair year, you and your host family must learn to recognize the differences in your communication styles. Together, you should discuss approaches to problem solving that are mutually comfortable.

Americans are usually very “up front” about dealing with problems or misunderstandings. They prefer to address disagreements directly and quickly, find a solution, and move on. Don’t let this “directness” startle you, especially if you come from a culture where expressing personal feelings, preferences, and opinions may be considered rude or socially unacceptable. Americans are direct even with elders or employers. Your host family will not expect you to agree with them simply because they are older or your employer.

Americans expect others to make eye contact during conversation, as this is considered respectful. Looking down or away while talking with your host parents may make you seem disrespectful or indicate that you are not listening. The American culture also uses smiling to communicate that everything is OK in a relationship—so smile when you see your host parents and children! Host parents will feel better if you smile when you see them, as it will communicate that you are happy and everything is going well.

You may find that Americans are usually comfortable with disagreement and conflict. They will expect you to do what you say you will. Host parents will perceive dishonesty if you agree to something when talking with them, but then ignore it later.

Americans say “thank you” more than many other countries and write thank you notes when someone has given a gift. Remember to say “thank you” to your host family often. Say “thank you” for dinner, for gifts, and for loaning you the car.

Understand the context

Host parents tend to be very busy. Please try not to be offended if they come home from work tired, upset, or don’t talk with you as much as you’d like. Realize that if your host parent is in a bad mood, it doesn’t mean it is about you.

Children have good days and bad days, just like you. Sometimes they say things that are mean. Remember that they are likely frustrated, and don’t know how to communicate that. Instead, they say hurtful things that are not truly personally directed at you.
Set up communication expectations

Daily communications

Talk with your host parents about how they would like you to share details of your day with the children. They may like you to use a Daily Log. They might designate a special spot on the kitchen counter to put homework, art projects, and pictures from the day. Likely, they will ask you about the details of their children’s day at dinnertime. Be prepared to share thoughtful observations about each child’s moods, eating and sleeping, activities and any information their teachers shared with you that day. Always give them one positive event that happened that day for each child.

Weekly meeting

Your host parents are encouraged to set aside time to talk to you each week. This meeting is a time to address any concerns, discuss schedules, and anything else about the children, the family or your stay in the U.S. It is very important that au pairs and host parents resolve small problems or misunderstandings before they turn into big ones. This weekly discussion could take the form of a weekly family meeting, in which all family members participate—or it could be a private time where you and your host parents discuss the week’s events over a cup of coffee. Try to schedule your weekly meeting for a time when you are all likely to be able to attend, and for when you are all well-rested rather than at the end of a long day.

Address problems as they arise

Don’t wait until your weekly meeting to bring up an issue. AuPairCare advises both au pairs and host families to address a problem when it arises, rather than to wait until they become frustrated and angry about a pattern that has emerged. For example, if your host family behaves in a manner that you do not appreciate or understand, discuss the problem with them that day to let them know of your concerns. If it is something you feel very uncomfortable about discussing with your family, speak with your Area Director for guidance.

Provide constructive feedback

Choose a time when your host parent can talk

If you have something you would like to discuss with your host parents, it's best to wait for a time when the children are asleep and your host parents seem to be in an unhurried mood. The conversation will go more smoothly if you start the conversation when they can give you their full attention.

Share solutions, not just problems

When you are talking with your host family about an issue, try to focus on describing the issue and your proposed solution. Provide a specific example of an issue that is hard for you.

Offer your host family constructive feedback, rather than just emotional reactions. For example, “It’s hard for me when you…..” and “It would be easier for me if you…..”
Always take responsibility for your role in the issue that has arisen. Share with your host parents what you are doing that contributes to the issue, and how you propose to change that. Do not try to assign “blame,” and instead focus on finding a way to move forward together with a solution.

**Involve your Area Director**

If a problem persists or becomes more serious despite your efforts to address it with your host family, your Area Director will work with you to try to improve the situation. Either you or your host family may ask the Area Director for assistance working through any issues. Your Area Director will most likely come to the host family home for a meeting with you and your host parents together. Because many issues will resolve themselves over time, AuPairCare expects au pairs and host families to wait 60 days from time of arrival before deciding to make a placement change (“rematch”).

You should use these two months to work constructively towards a strong match and solid relationship with your family. However, any decision regarding a placement change is made at AuPairCare’s sole discretion. Remember that AuPairCare cannot guarantee that you will find a new host family if you opt for a placement change, so do everything you can to make your current match a successful one!

If you are in a placement change situation, please read the “Placement Changes” section at the end of this handbook very carefully before proceeding.
Sharing Your Culture

Preparation

Successful cultural exchange goes both ways—your host family shares American culture with you, and you share your own culture with your host family.

Your host family has been asked to think about their family’s unique characteristics. They will try to take an objective look at their family culture and imagine how they will appear to you. This will help them be more sensitive to your adjustment after your arrival. Your family will also think about how they can share American culture with you. They will consider American holidays, customs, and foods that may new to you, and they will think of ways to enjoy these special activities with you.

Before you come to the United States, you should prepare to share traditions from your country with your host family. The Pre-Departure Orientation Project will help you learn more about how you can share your culture with your host family— and it will be a gift you present to your host family when you arrive at their home as the “kick off” to your cultural exchange.

How to Share Your Culture

Cultural exchange is one of the reasons your host family chose to host an au pair, so have fun sharing your culture with your host family. The children will benefit greatly from the opportunity to learn about your culture and to see American culture through your eyes. Along the way, they will come up with lots of great questions for you.

When you discuss cultural differences with your host children, stress the idea that cultures are different: not better, worse, weird, or strange, but just different. Children will also love to find humor in cultural differences, so share the things you find funny about it (or think they will.)

Babies and toddlers will enjoy hearing songs and stories from your home country. Singing the alphabet, counting and naming colors and body parts in your native language are also fun for young children. Using picture books to show images of your home country can also be a fun way to teach basic vocabulary words in your native language. You can also read the child's own books in both English and your own native language.

Your family will love it when you tell them about customs and traditions in your home country, cook a native dish, and talk about your country’s holidays. You might suggest celebrating one of those holidays with your host family.

Once you are comfortable in the U.S., you can even volunteer to visit your host children’s school or clubs to talk about your home country and culture with their friends and teachers. (Your Area Director can help you prepare for this.)
Experiencing American Culture

Where is American culture?

One of the main reasons you chose to become an au pair is your desire to experience American culture, and your Area Director and host family will help you explore different aspects of culture in the United States. You'll soon find that you can experience and explore America in many ways—it's around you in your daily life, not just the special trips and celebrations that will be part of your year.

Your Area Director will plan monthly activities or trips for you and the other au pairs in your area. Your host family may also invite you to join them on family trips and outings. You can also plan many interesting and low-cost trips of your own during your year. Since you will have ten paid vacation days during your twelve months, you can plan long weekends to make the most of your free time.

Another important way to experience American culture is to become involved with your community during your non-working hours. You can meet other people and experience America by joining local clubs, becoming a member of a church or synagogue community, taking classes and volunteering locally. (Check www.volunteermatch.org for volunteer opportunities in your area.)

Feel free to ask your family or field staff representative about local events, holidays and customs. Don't miss American holiday celebrations such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, or the Fourth of July (Independence Day). Learn how worldwide holidays such as Christmas, Easter, Passover and New Year's are celebrated here very differently than in your home country.

“American culture” also happens every day in the rhythm of your life with your host family and your local community. You can find it in your host children's description of their school day when you pick them up at the bus stop, the play dates you have at the local park, the conversations you have with other students in your classes, and the Saturday night movie outings with your friends.

Even the food served in your host family’s home is part of your cultural exchange. American meals tend to be less formal than in many other cultures. Americans often don't have as many “sit down” meals as in other cultures, but gathering together for meals as a family will be important for you and is valuable for the children. Although the food may seem strange, you should try everything at least once (unless a health or religious concern prevents it.) Offering to cook one of your own favorite meals for your family would be a nice gesture, and ensure that you can enjoy some of the favorite foods that remind you of home.

Even though you are excited about your year of cultural exchange, you will likely find that your emotional state shifts throughout the year. In the first few months, most au pairs progress through a predictable pattern of “culture shock” before they feel totally adjusted to life in the United States. At any time during the year, a milder case of “homesickness” may arise. Read on for what to expect and how to handle both common aspects of an extended stay in a new culture.
Culture Shock

The learning process you will go through as you adjust to life in the U.S. may be difficult at times due to “culture shock.”

Culture shock is experienced by all cross-cultural travelers adjusting to a new culture and language. It results from living in another culture where values, perceptions, cultural expectations and beliefs differ from those of your native country. Confusion, frustration, and stress often accompany the process of adjustment that foreigners may undergo when living in a new country.

If your native language is not English, language difficulty is one of the biggest contributing factors to culture shock. However, even au pairs from English-speaking countries experience culture shock due to the various customs and idiomatic language differences in America.

The effort involved in communicating in a second language can be exhausting, especially when you are adjusting too many other changes in your life. You may appear quiet or disinterested to your host family, when you are really just too tired to concentrate fully or talk. Your host family may find it difficult to understand the kind of concentration and effort required for you to speak to them in English all the time. You may feel frustrated with your inability to express complete ideas or feelings.

Most au pairs will experience some degree of culture shock. Patience, warmth, and talking openly about these symptoms can help both the au pair and family throughout the year.

Here are the phases of culture shock that you may experience throughout the year:

- **Honeymoon**
  - The “honeymoon period” is when you and your family feel that everything is new and exciting.
  - Both of you focus on cultural similarities. At this stage, you and your host family are much like tourists, intrigued by all of the cultural similarities.
- **Disenchantment**
  - The novelty has started to wear off and reality begins to set in. Your focus may shift to cultural differences rather than similarities. You may get homesick for familiar foods, sights, and friends.
  - In extreme cases, these symptoms may appear: homesickness, boredom, withdrawal, need for excessive amounts of sleep, irregular eating, irritability, need for affection, feeling uncomfortable with the new family, lack of confidence, stereotyping of Americans, inexplicable crying, or physical ailments such as stomach aches or headaches.
  - Patience and open communication are extremely important to help you pass quickly through this phase.
- **Recovery**
  - You will begin to feel more comfortable in your new environment and are on the road to recovery. What was once “threatening” and unknown has now become acceptable and familiar.
- **Acceptance**
  - You will begin to feel that you can now function in your new culture. You will speak much more easily in English, and you and your host family will become more accepting of each other.
  - In the end, it will be very difficult for you to contemplate leaving this new culture because you will have become so comfortable with it.
Homesickness

It is quite likely that you will be homesick—longing for your home or family—at some point while you are an au pair in the United States. It is only natural and is not something that should embarrass you. It is not a sign of failure to admit that you’re missing home. By traveling to the U.S. as an au pair, you’ve made a bold statement of independence. Homesickness may feel like you’re backtracking in some way, but it is not.

It is likely that you will miss something, but what that is could be anything--conversations with friends, the color of the road signs, people speaking your language, TV advertisements, or recognizable money. Trying to judge what you will miss is difficult, as you’ll never know until it happens.

We all like comfort. We all like things we know well and understand. Home is safe; home is easy. Move away from it for a bit and you soon realize where you’ve come from. As an au pair, you’ll likely miss home the most when things go wrong or when you’re ill. Birthdays and Christmas can be low points too. If you are miles away from home, you will sometimes feel distant from home and loved ones. In this way, we are all the same.

Handling Homesickness and Culture Shock

There are a few key ways of dealing with homesickness and the “disenchantment” phase of culture shock. The “cures” are as diverse as the people who are in the au pair program and you’ll soon discover what suits you.

Luckily, homesickness is usually mild and doesn’t last long. And there are things you can do to make sure it doesn’t spoil your fun.

First, talk about it with people who care for you:

- Talk about it with the people who care about you here
  - Share your feelings with your family and your Area Director. Be honest and open with your host family so they understand how you are feeling.
  - Talk to other au pairs who can empathize. Ask your local Area Director for someone you can call who experienced homesickness. Attending monthly meetings with other au pairs will also really help! Knowing you’re not the only one dealing with this will ease your feelings of loneliness, and you might feel better when you cheer up someone else.

- Take it one day at a time
  - Be patient with you — no one settles in immediately.
  - Focus on the “here and now.” Try to think of it as being on a long vacation. Remember that these memories will last your lifetime.

- Write in a journal
  - Writing about your feelings can help you understand them. Writing about homesickness may show you what you really miss, whether it’s your cat or the smell of breakfast on Sunday mornings. Then you can find a way to ease that ache, like asking your parents to send a picture of your pet or finding a local ethnic supermarket that sells your favorite treat from home.
• Each day, write down something that made you laugh and one new experience that you enjoyed or provided a sense of accomplishment. At the end of each week, read back over the week’s entries to celebrate how far you’ve come.

• Discover the best way to stay in touch with family and friends back home
  o Some people will find that it helps to phone home, send a few extra emails and postcards--and ask for some in return. For others it will add to the problem. They’ll prefer to ride it out and get in touch only when they’re feeling better about things.
  o Regardless, don’t call or email home every day. Try to make it a once a week routine on your day off of work. Have your family save the stories for your weekly calls or send a weekly email.
  o Share photos of your new life with your family and friends back home. They will love to see pictures of your new home and community and your host family.

Second, force yourself to take risks to experience your new culture:

• Participate in your host family’s life
  o Participate actively in your host family’s life so that you begin to feel less like a guest and feel more like a member of the family. Take time to know the people you now live with and remember that this is a new experience for everyone.
  o Understand that experiencing cultural differences is part of the benefit of your au pair experience. Try not to be too judgmental about the American lifestyle. Instead, try to observe it and tell stories of how your home culture is different.

• Start to build new friendships by meeting up with nearby au pairs and students from your classes in your off-hours.
  o Sign up early for your classes, especially English as a Second Language (ESL) class if the language barrier exacerbates your homesickness.
  o Make plans for your off-hours with other au pairs from your area.

Third, stay healthy and active:

• Stay active
  o If you just sit around in your room, you’ll have more time to think about feeling sad. Talk to people and start new activities, and before you know it, you’ll be too busy to be homesick.
  o Get involved with activities that will add structure to your “off duty” hours, such as classes, sports teams, clubs, volunteer programs, and religious communities.

• Get to bed early and maintain a balanced diet.
  o It’s tiring to navigate a new culture and take care of children at the same time, so give your body the sleep and fuel it needs.

Fourth, do something each day that makes you smile or laugh:

• Do something you enjoy every day
  o When you’re having fun, you’re less likely to spend time thinking about people and things you miss. Continue what you enjoy doing – whether it’s an evening walk after the kids go to bed, reading in your native language, or going to church.
  o Write your own list of things that are good for you so that you can refer to the list when you need to. Be creative! You could include things like take a bath, go to a
public place and people watch, listen to your music, or treat yourself to your favorite something.

- Keep your sense of humor
  - Laugh rather than cry at any cross-cultural mistakes. Telling your host children about frustrating cross-cultural experiences can often help you see the humor in them.

Finally, if you are having trouble combating a feeling of homesickness, take a moment to review your expectations. Sometimes feelings of sadness may also be feelings of disappointment when your au pair experience doesn't live up to your dreams. You may need to readjust what you want to get out of your experience.

Almost everyone has felt homesick at some time. Remember that there's a good side to homesickness too--it means you have family and friends worth missing and a place you want to return to when your adventure away from home is over.

In the long run, understanding American culture will help you better understand your own culture by challenging you to view your home country's ways from a new perspective. Ideally, you will become more tolerant and understanding of people and ways of life that are different from your own, and your au pair experience will truly have been a life-changing one.
Au Pair Program Requirements

You are a part of a very special program which allows you to work and live with a family with support from AuPairCare staff and the United States Department of State. You are considered a “foreign national” and with that designation comes a few obligations:

Discretion and Good Judgment

As an au pair, you are representing yourself, your natural family, your host family, the au pair program, and your home country. Please make sure you always conduct yourself in a positive way. While working and spending time with your children, please wear modest clothing and always act professionally. Be mindful of your language and tone of voice.

Respect your host family’s privacy by not discussing their family life with others. Likewise, do not share with your host parents what other au pairs are saying about their host families. Use discretion with your host parents when sharing your opinions on how to raise their children. Be careful not to tell your host parents what they should or should not be doing with their children, home, or life.

Au Pair Agreement

When you applied to become an AuPairCare au pair, you agreed to specific program requirements. To refer back to these, log in to Au Pair Room or refer to the paperwork your overseas office partner agency provided. Specifically, remember that:

- **AuPairCare is a non-smoking program.** Au pairs are expected not to smoke during their program participation, including Au Pair Academy. Au pairs who smoke may be removed from a host family and/or dismissed from the program. Au pairs dismissed from the program are responsible for the cost of their return flight. By law, smoking is also forbidden in most public places including restaurants, airports, and stores in the United States.

- **Use of non-prescription drugs in any amount at any time is a violation of U.S. law and of the Au Pair Agreement you signed when you applied to be an au pair.** Au pairs found to have been using drugs will be dismissed from the program immediately and will be responsible for the cost of their return flight.

- **The legal age to drink alcohol in the U.S. is age 21.** It is illegal for au pairs who are not 21 years old to drink any alcohol at any time in the United States. Use of a “fake identification” to gain access to alcohol is illegal and can result in serious legal charges.

Monthly Meetings

Your Area Director will organize at least one au pair meeting per month. These meetings usually involve a coffee night, party, outdoor activity, or event. You are expected to attend these local events unless you are ill, have school, or are on vacation. Host Families are instructed to provide time off for you when you have a monthly event.
These activities provide a support system for you to develop friendships within the cluster, offer unique opportunities for cultural exchange (so you can learn about not only American culture but the many other countries that au pairs represent), and help you develop a trusting relationship with your Area Director.

The Au Pair Agreement you signed states: “I agree to attend all monthly meetings and activities arranged by local AuPairCare field staff.” If you are unable to attend a meeting, you must contact your Area Director beforehand and let the Area Director know why you are unable to attend.

Monthly Communications

With Your Area Director

Your Area Director will try to make contact with you each month, if the Area Director leaves you a phone message, you need to call back! This is very important. If your Area Director doesn’t hear back from you after several tries, the AuPairCare headquarters office and your overseas agency office will get involved. It is also helpful to respond when you receive reminder emails or the newsletter each month so that your Area Director knows that you are aware of the upcoming events.

With Other Au Pairs

It is important to return phone calls and emails promptly from other au pairs in your cluster. As a new au pair, you will want to reach out to make friends. As an au pair in this program, it is important to be inclusive. During your year, be sure to call and welcome new au pairs and invite them to join your activities.

Educational Requirement

The U.S. Department of State requires that you complete coursework as part of your au pair experience. If you cannot provide proof that you completed your coursework requirement, you will not receive a completion bonus, program completion certificate, or be eligible to apply to the Extension Program.

The educational aspect of your au pair year is a wonderful opportunity that provides not only educational value and the chance to learn about American culture, but also the opportunity to meet Americans your own age.

Research your classes soon after your arrival. Try to start your classes as soon as the next semester begins. Classes are a great way to meet friends, improve your English, and settle in to your life here. Starting classes early will also ensure that you are eligible to extend your program.

Guidelines for eligible classes

Your Area Director will provide information about nearby schools and can confirm for you which classes will fulfill the requirement. For your own reference, here are the basic guidelines set up by the United States Department of State for all au pairs:
How much coursework to complete

- First year au pairs, 9-month extension au pairs, and 12-month extension au pairs must complete 6 credits. This is the equivalent of 60 hours of classroom time.
- Six-month extension au pairs must complete 3 credits. This is the equivalent of 30 hours of classroom time.

How to pay for coursework

- Host families must provide $500 education stipend during the au pair’s first year. Host families must provide an additional education stipend during an au pair’s extension period: $500 for a 9- or 12-month extension and $300 for a 6-month extension.
- Additional costs are the responsibility of the au pair.

What types of classes to take

- Courses must be taken at an accredited post secondary institution.
- Courses must be taken in person in the local community. Online courses and travel courses sponsored by accredited institutions are not acceptable.
- Classes must be academic. Examples of eligible classes include sign language, foreign languages, math, writing, sociology and English as a Second Language (ESL). Examples of classes that do not meet the requirement are yoga, massage, crafts, modeling classes and scuba diving certification courses.

Deadline

- Coursework must be completed by the end of the 11th month of your first year in order to apply to extend your au pair program. You will not be allowed to extend your program unless you can provide proof that you have met the education requirement by the end of the 11th month. The U.S. Department of State strictly enforces this requirement.

What do I need to do?

- Download the Education Requirement forms from Au Pair Room.
- Fill out the My Education Plan form and send it to your Area Director. Talk to your Area Director to determine your deadline.
- Attend your classes. On the last day of each course, ask your instructor to sign the Coursework Completion Form. You can collect signatures for all your classes on one form.
- Ideally 45 days before your program end date, make sure you have completed all of your required coursework and collected signatures so you can now submit the Coursework Completion Form.
- If you are not extending your program, send the Coursework Completion Form to your Area Director.
- If you are applying to extend your program, submit the Coursework Completion Form with your extension application to AuPairCare’s San Francisco headquarters.
- Your Area Director will verify your Coursework Completion Form and send it to AuPairCare. If you are extending, the San Francisco office will verify and process it.
- AuPairCare will provide your completion bonus and certificate at least 15 days prior to your program end date if you have submitted your form on time. If you are extending your program, you will receive your extension bonus soon after your application is approved.
- Keep a copy of your program completion certificate in a safe place. It will be valuable if you ever apply for a new visa to visit or work in the United States.
Understand Key Aspects of the Educational Requirement

The Department of State "requires that each Au Pair participant register and attend classes offered by an accredited U.S. post-secondary institution for not less than 6 semester hours of academic credit, or the equivalent" during her/his year in the United States. To understand this requirement, you'll need to understand some key terms. They are:

- **“An accredited institution”** is one that has been granted accreditation by a regional or national accrediting commission of schools and colleges as a “stamp of approval”. Your Area Director will provide a list of accredited institutions in your area. If you do not see the school you would like to attend on that list, please check these websites to search the databases AuPairCare uses to determine accreditation. If the school is listed in one of these databases, it should be fine to take classes there, but confirm with your Area Director before registering for the class:
  - [http://educationusa.state.gov/](http://educationusa.state.gov/)
  - [http://www.utexas.edu/world/comcol/state](http://www.utexas.edu/world/comcol/state)
  - [http://www.utexas.edu/world/univ/state](http://www.utexas.edu/world/univ/state)

- **“Post-secondary”** means an institution that offers at least a one-year program of college-level studies. Post-secondary literally means “after secondary”. In the United States, secondary school ends after grade 12 (grades 9-12 are often referred to as “high school”). The traditional student will graduate from high school around the age of 18. At this point or later, a person may apply for admission to post-secondary institutions in America (often a "college" or "university").

- **“Academic credit”** describes the level of commitment the class requires, and is the unit of measure for coursework. Generally, a class that meets for 3 hours a week for approximately 10 weeks is the equivalent of a 3 credit course.

- **“Equivalent”** to academic credit means the “trimester” or “quarter hour” system used by some colleges and universities. The equivalent of 6 credits is generally considered to be 60 hours of class time. You can meet your educational requirement by taking either 6 credits or 60 hours of class time. Many au pairs meet the educational requirement by attending 60 hours of class time, which may occur before the full course is completed.

Making the Most of Your Educational Stipend

Your host family will provide $500 towards your educational costs in your first year of the program, and additional funds during your extension period. You can use these funds to cover tuition and course materials. If your coursework costs are under $500, you cannot receive the rest of the educational stipend directly from your host family.

Use your $500 stipend carefully so that it covers as much coursework as possible. Here are some ideas to consider:

- **Public institutions** are less expensive than private institutions. In most cases, au pairs will need to pay “out of state” tuition, but this is usually still less expensive than tuition at a private college or university.

- **A community college, technical college, or junior college** program is often less expensive than at a four-year college or university. These programs often offer excellent
classes in English as a Second Language (ESL.) They also offer a broad range of courses in the arts and social sciences as well as technology.

- **Auditing classes** allows students to attend a class with limited participation and with no grade given. If auditing is available to the au pair, the cost may be less. Each individual institution decides if it will allow auditing.

- **Enrolling as “non-credit”** is often less expensive than enrolling in the same class for credit. "Non-credit" classes are only acceptable towards the requirement if the school also offers the course “for credit”. Not all schools allow this, so check with the institution you’d like to attend. You simply count the number of hours you attend the class and count them towards the requirement to attend 60 hours.

**Education Is a Key Component of Program Completion**

If you do not complete the educational component of the program for any reason, you will not have successfully completed the au pair program as defined by the U.S. Department of State.

You will not receive a program completion certificate or program completion bonus. You will not be eligible to extend your program, or to return to the United States as a Repeat Au Pair. If you apply for another visa to live or work in the United States in the future, your failure to complete the au pair program may adversely affect your visa application.
Life in the United States

Life in the United States is a very large country where climate, culture, and customs vary from region to region. Some aspects of life are the same wherever you are. Others will be more specific to your community and new home.

Your New Country

Although the United States is a very diverse country, many things are similar no matter where you are, including:

Currency

American paper money comes in a standard size and all denominations are green in color. The difference in the bills is in the famous face on the bill and the number in the corner. Bills are available in $1, $5, $10, $20, $50 and $100 denominations. Most businesses prefer to accept bills that are $20 or less. It can be difficult for businesses to make change for a $50 or $100 bill.

U.S. coins do not have numbers marked on them, only the name of the coin. Coins come in different denominations and each denomination is a different size. One dollar is equivalent to 100 cents.

Below is a table explaining American currency:

- 1 penny (brown coin) = 1 cent
- 100 pennies = 1 dollar (paper bill)
- 1 nickel (medium sized silver coin) = 5 cents
- 20 nickels = 1 dollar
- 1 dime (smallest silver coin) = 10 cents
- 10 dimes = 1 dollar
- 1 quarter (largest silver coin) = 25 cents
- 4 quarters = 1 dollar
- 1 dollar = 100 cents

Hitchhiking

When you travel, remember that hitchhiking is not only illegal, but it is very dangerous. You put yourself at major risk by asking for or accepting rides from strangers. Instead, find out about public transportation in your area (buses, trains, taxis, streetcars) or talk to your host family about the possibility of being dropped off or picked up when you go out. Always carry the telephone number of someone you can contact in case you find yourself without transportation.

Holidays

The following are typical holidays and observances in the United States. These are days of celebration in many communities, but are not always days off from work or school. Au pairs are expected to work their regular schedule even on holidays, unless otherwise instructed by their host parents.
Holidays that are particularly popular with children are indicated by (*). Talk with your host family about holidays that they observe:

- January:
  - New Year’s Eve is celebrated on December 31st. New Year’s Day may involve a special meal.
- February:
  - President’s Day is celebrated on the 3rd Monday of February to honor Presidents.
  - Valentine’s Day (*) is celebrated on February 14th. It is common to send Valentine’s cards to those you love.
- March:
  - St. Patrick’s Day is celebrated on March 17th. All Americans of Irish descent are celebrated on this day. You’ll see lots of green.
- April:
  - April Fool’s Day (*) is celebrated on April 1st by playing little “tricks” on friends.
  - Easter is a Christian holiday that falls according to the church calendar. Many schools have a one-week “Spring Break” at Eastertime.
- May:
  - Mother’s Day (*) is celebrated on the second Sunday of May. Children make cards for their mothers and often the family plans a special day for her.
  - Memorial Day is celebrated on the last Monday of May. This holiday honors the memory of all soldiers who have died in battle. It also unofficially marks the beginning of summer.
- June:
  - Summer vacation begins when schools close in June.
  - Father’s Day (*) is celebrated on the third Sunday of June. Children make cards for their fathers and often the family plans a special day for him.
- July:
  - Independence Day (*) is celebrated on July 4th to honor the signing of the “Declaration of Independence” by the founders of the United States. It is celebrated with picnics, barbeques, parades and fireworks. You’ll see lots of red, white and blue in honor of the colors of the American flag.
- August:
  - There are no major holidays in August, but this is often a time when families take a vacation.
- September:
  - Labor Day is the first Monday in September. This is a day dedicated to American workers, and is considered the last weekend of summer.
- October:
  - Columbus Day is October 12th in memory of the “discovery” of America by Christopher Columbus on October 12th, 1492.
  - Halloween (*) is celebrated on October 31st. Halloween is celebrated with “trick-or-treating,” when children dress up in costumes and visit neighbor’s homes to ask for treats (candy.)
- November:
  - Veteran’s Day is celebrated on November 11th to honor American war veterans.
  - Thanksgiving Day (*) is the last Thursday of November. The Thanksgiving Day dinner traditionally includes a turkey, stuffing, cranberries, and pumpkin pie.
- December:
  - Chanukah (a Jewish holiday), Christmas (a Christian holiday) and Kwanzaa (a holiday of African descent) are all celebrated in December.
  - Schools are usually closed for two weeks at the end of December & beginning of January.
Measurements

Instead of the metric system, Americans use Fahrenheit, inches, feet, miles, pounds, pints, quarts, and gallons.

You can use the following website to convert lengths, weights, volumes and temperatures: http://www.worldwidemetric.com/metcal.htm

Postal Service

Ask your host family to show you where the nearest post office is located or search for it online at U.S. Post Office locations. The cost of mailing a letter or package will vary depending on the weight of the package.

For international mail be sure to label your package “air mail” so it will be sent first class. You should also clearly label the country you are mailing to. Inquire at your local post office for more detailed information about mailing letters and packages overseas, as well as ways to expedite delivery if necessary.

If you need something to be delivered quickly and need to track it, then FedEx or UPS are usually your best options. Both offer domestic overnight and 2 to 5 day service worldwide. The faster you want your package to arrive, the more it will cost!

- FedEx: 1 (800) 463-3339 www.fedex.com
- UPS: 1 (800) 742-5877 www.ups.com

Legal Drinking Age

United States law forbids drinking of any type of alcohol until age 21. This includes beer, wine, liquor—any type of alcohol. If you are over 21 and you go out with your friends, please follow the widespread custom of choosing one person at the start of the evening who will not drink alcohol and will drive everyone home— the “designated driver.”

The United States is extremely strict about driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If you choose to “Drive under the Influence” (“a DUI”), you could incur severe legal costs, lose your license and/or experience jail time.

Especially when you drive your host family’s car, do not drive after having even one drink. Remember that it is illegal for anyone in the car to have an “open container” of an alcoholic drink.

When you are behind the wheel, you are responsible for the safety of everyone in your car, and everyone else on the road. Take the privilege of driving seriously— you do not want anyone to get hurt.

Even if you are not driving, you still must be 21 years old to buy or drink alcohol. Any au pair under 21 years of age caught drinking or using false identification cards in order to buy or drink alcohol may be dismissed from the program. Failure to obey laws regarding the legal drinking age may also incur major legal expenses that will be your responsibility.
Finally, never allow friends to drink alcohol while you are socializing with them in your host family’s home. Regardless of whether they are old enough to legally drink, this creates legal liability for your host family because they can be held responsible for accidents caused by anyone who drank in their home.

Sales Tax

The price you see on a price tag is not always what you will actually pay at the register. Some states have sales tax that is added to the price of the items. Sales tax and taxable items differ from state to state. For example, some states place a tax on clothes, but others do not.

Sales tax varies from 4% to 9%. Ask your Area Director about the sales tax in your new home state.

Income Taxes for Au Pairs

Because the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) considers an au pair to be an “employee” of the host family, au pairs are required to file a United States (U.S.) individual income tax return even though many au pairs will not owe taxes. AuPairCare understands the issue of taxes can be confusing, so we provide you with some general guidelines; however, AuPairCare is not licensed to provide official tax advice, so we cannot counsel you regarding personal tax matters and responsibilities. We encourage you to direct questions directly to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) online at www.irs.ustreas.gov or by calling 1-800-829-1040.

If you receive more than $3,300 in weekly au pair stipend payments during a calendar year (January 1 through December 31), you will likely have a tax bill due to the United States Internal Revenue Service. Depending on what time of the calendar year you arrived in the United States to begin your au pair program, you may make below the minimum amount in au pair stipend required for taxation in that year. Often, au pairs who are in the United States for less than 4 months in a calendar year do not owe taxes.

By April 15th of each year, you should use Form 1040NR-EZ or Form 1040NR to report your au pair stipend wages for the previous calendar year. (For example, on April 15, 2010, tax returns are due for wages earned between January 1 and December 31, 2009.) You will need some record of the stipend payments you received from your host family, so from the start of your program please be sure to use the Stipend Payment Receipt Log available from your Area Director and in the “Information Center” page in Au Pair Room.

For au pairs who do owe taxes, the amount is usually equal to one to two weeks’ stipend. You should plan ahead to have these funds available in April when you submit your tax form. (Taxes on income earned between January 1st through December 31st are always due on April 15th of the following year. Long lines at the post office on April 15th to mail tax returns are an American tradition!)

An au pair is not a full-time student in the United States, and therefore is not eligible to exclude his/her au pair wages from gross income under the student article of any U.S. income tax treaty. Nor are au pairs eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Hope Credit or the Lifetime Learning Credit.

Your Area Director has access to all of the tools you will need to file your tax return including:

- 1040NR-EZ Tax Form
- A Sample 1040NR-EZ Form to assist you in completing your tax return
A Stipend Payment Receipt Log to help you track your stipend wages.
An Au Pair Stipend Earnings Chart to assist you in calculating your earned stipend total
A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) of commonly asked au pair questions related to taxes with answers to address many of the concerns you may be having

Tax forms are available at any United States Post Office, or you may also download forms here:

- Nearly all au pairs can use Form 1040NR-EZ with these Instructions for 1040NR-EZ
- Au pairs who claim dependents can use Form 1040-NR

Many au pairs have found the following tax services helpful in preparing their tax return. Please note that these companies may charge a small fee for their services. AuPairCare makes no professional recommendations, nor do we guarantee your satisfaction with the following services:

- http://www.rttax.com
- http://www.taxback.com

Telephone Calls

Phone numbers in the U.S. consist of a 3-digit area code (415), then a 7-digit local number (222-4444).

Phone numbers in the U.S. may contain letters, especially “toll-free” phone numbers. When you look at the phone pad you will see that each number corresponds to 3 letters. Simply press the number where the letter appears.

There are three main types of phone calls you may make while in the United States:

- **Calls within the United States**
  If you call a number within or outside of your area (i.e. a phone number that has or does not have the same 3-digit area code as the phone you are calling from), you will usually need to dial 1 plus the area code (415) and then the 7-digit local number (222-4444).
  Some small towns with only one area code may only require you to dial the 7-digit local number. Ask your host or dial “0” for help from an operator.

- **International Calls**
  When making international calls you must dial “011” (except when using the AuPairCare eKit Phone Card) followed by the country code, city code (you must drop the “0” before the city code) and the phone number. To find out the country code for your home country, visit www.countrycallingcodes.com. International calls tend to be expensive, so you should not use your host family’s telephone without their permission. It is much less expensive to use a phone card for international calls.

- **Emergency Phone Number – 911**
  Wherever you are in the U.S., you can dial 911 on any telephone in an emergency. You will be connected to emergency services (fire department, police and ambulance). This is always a free call.

Telephone cards are gaining popularity in the U.S. because they are pre-paid, easy to use and usually offer competitive international rates. Unlike in most other countries, phone cards in the U.S. are not inserted into the telephone. Phone cards have a toll free number, 1 (800) plus 7-digits, which you dial first. To use the AuPairCare eKit Phone Card, dial 1 (800) 706-1333. When prompted enter your access code or account number and PIN and follow the instructions.
Your family can help you practice using “Call Waiting”. This service enables you to answer a second call without disconnecting your current phone call. When you're on the phone, a “Call Waiting” tone alerts you when you have another incoming call. You can simply put the first caller on hold and answer the second call, usually by pressing the “flash” button or switch hook. To return to the first call, simply press the same button again.

Be sure to talk with your host family about house rules for telephone use. You must always make your personal calls when you are not working. To stay safe, never give out the host family's address or agree to any sales call when someone unknown calls the home.

Also, ask your host family how they would like you to answer the phone. For example, “Hello. Smith residence. This is Anna…” Also learn your host family’s system for taking phone messages. Write down a message each time someone calls for a host family member who is not there.

Tipping

Tipping is a common practice across the U.S., and people generally give a tip to anyone in the service industry. This includes restaurants, hotels, taxis and bars. Individuals who work in these areas receive low wages because tipping is the custom, and in fact they make most of their income from tips. Please respect this practice.

Generally, provide tip of 15-20% is standard in restaurants, 10% for taxi drivers, and $2 to $3 is typical for food delivery and hotel service. You do not need to tip at fast-food, buffet-style, or take-out restaurants.

Your New Community

For more detailed information about the community where your host family lives, you can visit the My Location section in Au Pair Room. Your Area Director will also share information about your local community.

Health Clubs

Joining a gym is a great way to get in shape and possibly make some new friends. Many au pairs gain some weight after being in the United States for a few months and they find that joining a gym is a great way to stay healthy.

For inexpensive options, check out the YMCA (www.ymca.net), Bally's Total Fitness (www.ballyfitness.com), your local Community Recreation Center, or ask your host parents if you can join their gym.

Ethnic Supermarkets

Sometimes there are a few foods from home that are a treat to find here in the U.S., or you want to track down a specific ingredient for a special meal from home that you are making with your host family.
Your Area Director or other au pairs in your cluster may know of specific ethnic markets in your community, so be sure to ask.

**Religious Communities**

Talk with your host family about whether they attend service or observe religious practices at home. Attending religious services or groups may be an excellent way to meet other young people in your community. However, you should not feel pressured to attend your host family’s services. Your host family will accommodate your desire to attend your own religious services if you express that need to them.

**Other Resources**

Other au pairs in your cluster will be happy to share information about fun local events, inexpensive shops, local transportation options, and more. You can always find a list of au pairs in your cluster and their emails in *Au Pair Room*, so log in and find other au pairs to contact for the “real” information about life and resources in your new community.

**Your New Home**

Your host family is excited to share their home with you. They want to help you feel like it is now your home, too. To share your new home comfortably, both you and your host family need to make an effort to respect one another in this shared space. For example:

- Act like a real family member as you would in your own family. You could answer the phone, bring in the mail, take out the kitchen garbage, or bring in the empty garbage cans from the road.
- Always leave the house the same way you received it. Clean up after yourself and the children throughout the day. Put things away in the same place where you got them.
- Lower your voice inside the house when the kids are sleeping, when you are talking on the phone, and when you have friends visiting.
- Keep your family’s home secure. When you come home, lock the doors and turn off the lights. When talking with strangers or online, do not give out any information about yourself, your family, or your home.
- Be aware that electric, gas and water can be costly. Families try not to waste resources. Please turn off lights and the TV when you leave a room. Turn the water off when you are not using it. Keep windows and outside doors closed when the heat or air conditioning is on.

Other helpful tips about your new home include:

**Your Room**

Your room is a private space for you to relax and unwind. It is also a part of your host family’s home. To respect your host parents’ willingness to share their home with you, you should:

- Keep your room tidy—put away clothing and make your bed daily.
- Empty your garbage weekly.
- Launder your sheets and towels at least weekly.
- Vacuum your room weekly.
- Always close your windows when you leave the house in case it rains.
- Turn your lights off when you are not in your room.
Be sure to turn off the TV, stereo, curling iron, etc when you are not in your room.
Clear empty dishes or glasses from your room.
Store food in the kitchen instead of your room.
Tell your host parents immediately if you spill something. They can help you remove the stain. Stains not taken care of right away usually do become permanent.

Computer

If you have your own laptop, please make sure you have it in a safe place away from the children as they can damage it very easily. Free access to computers and the Internet is usually available at your local library and at the school where you enroll for your coursework.

Some families also share their own computer with their au pairs. If your host family shares their personal computer with you, please:

- Respect your host family rules about their computer. If they need the computer for work or children need it for homework, make sure you let them use it first.
- Use the computer only when you are “off duty.” If your children are napping during your working hours, use the time to complete child-related household chores.
- Visit only appropriate web sites. Remember that your host parents can see what web sites you visit.
- Ask your host parents before you download anything.
- Ask your host parents before you upload any photo that includes members of their family, especially the children.
- Do not use the Internet to meet other people in the United States, no matter where they live. Instead, build your network of new friends in person—starting with the other au pairs in your cluster.
- Never share your host family’s address, phone number, or information about the family with anyone you meet online or post this information in social networking websites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace). This puts you and your host family at great risk.

Plumbing

Hot water is available without turning on a special switch. Be careful when running the children’s baths, as the water can be hot enough to burn.

The hot water supply is limited by the size of the hot water heater—so if everyone needs to take showers in the morning, keep your shower short so that the hot water doesn’t run out!

Place used toilet paper into the toilet. The plumbing in the U.S. is safe for toilet paper. However, remember to flush only toilet paper down the toilet. Everything else will be problematic. Baby wipes, diapers, tissues, sanitary napkins and tampons should all be thrown away in the trash can. They will clog the toilet.

Washing Machine and Clothes Dryer

Ask your host family how to best use the washing machine and dryer. They can even put stickers on the controls to remind you what settings to use. Remind them to show you how to adjust the water levels, remove lint from the dryer and what types of clothing can and cannot go in the dryer. When in doubt, set an item of clothing out to air-dry rather than put it in the dryer.

Remember to do separate laundry loads for light colors vs. dark colors. When in doubt, use cold water for washing and low temperatures for drying.
Dishwasher

Ask your host family if they have a "system" for placing dishes and utensils in the washer, since some items can only go on the top rack. Ask which washing cycle they prefer to use.

Keep in mind that "dishwashing liquid" for hand washing dishes is different from "dish detergent" for the dish washer. Ask your host family to show you which product is used for which process.

Recycling vs. Garbage

Most families are very conscientious about recycling. Most homes have a separate trash can vs. recycling can. Please ask your host family what type of products can be recycled and what types of products need to be thrown out in the garbage. Generally, many types of glass and plastic containers, metal and aluminum cans, newspaper, and cardboard are recyclable.

Microwave

Many families use microwaves to heat or reheat food. Only use cookware that is specially manufactured for use in the microwave oven. Glass, ceramic containers, and all plastics that are safe to use will usually be labeled for microwave oven use.

The following containers ARE safe to use in the microwave: Any utensil labeled for microwave use, heatproof glass, glass-ceramic (such as Corning Ware,) oven cooking bags, baskets (straw and wood) for quick warm-ups of rolls or bread, most paper plates, towels, napkins and bags, wax paper, parchment paper, heavy plastic wrap (if vented so steam can escape).

The following containers are NOT safe to use in the microwave: Anything with metal, brown paper bags and newspapers, metal pans, foam-insulated containers, dishware with metallic paint or trim, “take-out” containers, metal "twist ties" on package wrapping, or aluminum foil.

When heating food in the microwave for children, be sure to test it before you serve it. Microwaves can create heat food unevenly, and the "hot spots" can easily burn a child. Never heat a bottle in the microwave—always use hot water in the sink, on the stove, or a bottle warmer. Never microwave breast milk for a baby. The microwave can destroy the special fats and antibodies in both breast milk and formula.

Stove

The stove may be either gas or electric. Ask your host parents for instructions about how to use their stove.

When you are cooking with the children nearby, you can protect them from burns if you:

- Use the back burners instead of the front burners
- Keep all pot handles pointed in towards the back of the stove
- Put a teakettle of water on any hot burner after you turn it off
- Do not attempt to move a hot pot while holding a young child. Leave hot pots on the stove to cool before moving them over to the sink or counter.

If a child is “helping” you prepare a meal, do not let the child near the stove. Instead, ask the child to help by stirring cool ingredients, setting the table, or serving prepared foods to the plates.
Sink Disposal

Many families have garbage disposals in the kitchen sink. The only things that should go into a garbage disposal are what are left over after you scrape your plate into the garbage can. Large amounts of food should never be put into the disposal. This should go in the trash instead.

Do not put the following items down the disposal: plastic and metal, bones, grease, egg shells, potato skins, corn cobs or husks, lettuce, fruit pits, asparagus, artichokes, onion skins or other fibrous fruits and vegetables. If you’re not sure if something can go down the disposal, put it in the trash instead.

Anytime you put anything in your disposal make sure you run cold water for about 30 seconds during and after you turn it on. This prevents the motor from overheating.

Emergency Preparedness

Although emergencies are rare, you need to know what to do when one happens. Make it a point to talk with your host family about all of the following:

- Ask your host family to post emergency phone numbers by every phone in the house (poison control, fire department, police department, the children’s pediatrician, host parent work and cell phone numbers, local neighbor’s phone number).
- Find out where a fire extinguisher is stored in the kitchen and how to use it.
- Ask your host parents how to shut off water to the toilets and how to use the plunger.
- Ask to see where the circuit breakers are in the home and how to reset them.
- Find out where the flashlights and batteries are stored.
- Ask how to shut off the gas to the stove in case you smell gas.
- If you live in a region where natural disaster preparedness is important, ask your family to describe their emergency plan and point out their emergency kit. Learn the location of the “emergency meeting place” or “emergency shelter”.

Your Health

Health Insurance

All au pairs are covered by medical and accident insurance for the duration of their program year. If you have questions about the coverage, please refer to the insurance booklet provided to you at Au Pair Academy. It outlines the coverage in detail. Please review your insurance booklet for covered illnesses and injuries. Note the specific exceptions (i.e. injuries sustained while skiing or horseback riding.)

Insurance provider

In an emergency situation, call 911. This is a free phone call that will reach emergency responders and is the quickest way to request an ambulance.

For non-emergency health needs, contact AuPairCare’s insurance provider before seeking medical treatment. Au pairs are insured through USI insurance.

For all information regarding your USI insurance coverage, please:

- Call AIG Assist at: 1-800-626-2427
- Or visit http://www.travelinsure.com/partners/aupaircare/index.shtml. This website provides information about USI insurance coverage, allows you to find a Preferred Provider in your area, download a new insurance card, and submit and track claim. A policy number is not required in order to access the website.

USI Insurance recommends that you use their Preferred Provider Network of hospitals, physicians, and other health care providers in order to minimize your own costs. Their Preferred Provider Network includes providers in the Beech Street and NPPN. You may contact the groups below to locate a Preferred Provider in your area.

Beech Street
- www.beechstreet.com
- 800-557-1656
- Available 24 hours

NPPN
- www.nppn.com
- 866-723-6674
- Mon-Fri 5:30am – 3:00pm PST

If you are unable to find a provider, contact Maksin Management Corporation directly and they will assist you in finding a provider in your area.

Maksin Management
- www.maksin.com
- 800-432-1176
- Mon – Thurs 5:30am -5:00pm
- Friday 5:30am – 3:00pm PST
Each doctor visit will require you to pay a $25 co-pay when you sign in for your appointment. For emergency room visits that do not result in admittance to a medical facility, you will be required to pay a $250 deductible.

USI insurance also covers lost luggage up to $500. It covers costs for a flight home in case of the death of an immediate family member. If you need an emergency flight, do not book it yourself or ask your host family to do so. Call the insurance carrier for assistance planning travel home.

### Insurance provider for au pairs with the STS Overseas Partner Agency

If you are an au pair through the STS Agency, you should contact the following company if you need to see a doctor:

Global Medical Management, Inc.  
7901 SW 36th Street, Suite 100  
Davie, FL 33328  
Tel: 1.888.213.5086  
Fax: 1.954.370.8130  
Email: gmmi@usamed.com

With other questions about your health insurance coverage, please contact your overseas STS agency office directly.

### Common Questions

- **I have to visit the doctor/dentist/hospital. What do I do?**
  USI insured’s should contact the Beech Street Network or the National Preferred Provider Network (NPPN) for a list of participating providers at:

  **Beech Street Network**  
  (800) 432-1776  
  available 24 hours

  **NPPN**  
  (800) 557-1656  
  8:30am – 6pm EST Mon-Fri

  Provider information is also available at the USI/AuPairCare insurance website at:  

  You may be required to pay for the doctor’s visit out of pocket and then submit the receipts with a claim form to your insurance company for reimbursement. (If you are an au pair with STS insurance, please call 1-866-684-6832.)

- **What should I do if I am sick?**
  When you are sick or injured, it is extremely important to call the toll free number of your insurance agency before visiting a doctor or clinic. The representative will be able to assist you in finding a doctor and let you know if your ailment is likely to be covered by the insurance. If it is not covered, you will be responsible for the costs of the associated healthcare.

- **I have a medical or dental emergency. What should I do?**
  Go to the emergency room if you have an urgent medical problem that requires immediate attention. If possible, call your insurance company’s toll-free number to find the appropriate emergency care facility. Note that emergency rooms do not handle urgent dental issues.
Do not go to the emergency room if you do not have an urgent or life-threatening illness. If you go to the Emergency Room for care and you are not admitted or if treatment was not necessary for acute illness or accident, you will need to pay a high deductible (~$250.00). If you are admitted to the hospital the $250.00 will be paid for by the insurance company. Instead, locate a non-urgent care medical facility where you can receive treatment. If you need to locate a non-urgent medical provider, call your insurance company and they will refer you.

- **What doctors can I see?**
  Although you can see any doctor, AuPairCare highly recommends that au pairs to go to doctors that have a relationship with the insurance carrier ("in network provider"). These doctors will usually bill the insurance company for the au pair. If you visit a doctor that does not have a relationship with the insurance company ("out of network provider"), you will have to pay all the costs yourself first, then apply to the insurance company to be reimbursed. Your costs are also likely to be higher, since insurance carriers provide less coverage when you visit a doctor who is "out of network."

- **If I am sick, will my host family have back-up child care?**
  If you are ill, your host family should have an alternative source of child care that they can use on these occasions. If you miss a day or two of work due to illness, you should make it up by working extra hours later on, as long as it does not exceed 45 hours per week and 10 hours per day. You should still receive your full stipend for the week.

- **I need to submit a claim to my insurance company. How do I do so?**
  Please call your insurance company’s toll-free number and ask to speak to the Claims Department. The representative will provide specific details. Make sure to keep a copy of all paperwork you submit to the insurance company. (USI au pairs may file an electronic claim form at: [http://www.travelinsure.com/partners/aupaircare/index.shtml](http://www.travelinsure.com/partners/aupaircare/index.shtml)

- **I have a question about a bill I received from the doctor/dentist/hospital. What do I do?**
  With your bill in hand, please call your insurance company’s claim center and ask to speak to a representative. You will need to give the representative your name and birth date. (If you are an au pair with STS insurance, please call 1-888-213-5086.)
Vacation and Holidays

During your year as an au pair, you will receive two weeks paid vacation time. During these two weeks of vacation, your host family will pay your weekly stipend.

You will earn one vacation day per month after your third month in the country. Your ten vacation days may be taken together or separately. You must pre-schedule your planned vacations with your host family at a time that is mutually convenient. Your host family may have preferred times (e.g. Christmas holidays or a specific week in summer) for your vacation—check with them.

When you extend your program, you will earn an additional 10 days of vacation (for 9- or 12-month extensions) or 5 days of vacation (for 6-month extensions).

Questions that au pairs often ask about vacations include:

- **Do I have to work on American holidays?**
  - Yes. Au Pairs do not automatically receive national holidays off. However, at the start of your placement, you should talk with your host family about which holidays you will have off. If you would prefer to have your own country’s national holidays off, discuss this with your host family. Keep in mind that the family is not required to give you holidays off, so try not to ask for too many. When you have reached an agreement about holidays with your family, write them down so that there is no confusion in the future.
  - If you request to take vacation on a holiday that falls on a day when you would usually be scheduled to work, this does count as a vacation day. Although au pairs may be scheduled to work on holidays, AuPairCare recommends that au pairs also be invited by the family to participate in holiday celebrations and traditions.
  - For a list of American holidays, refer to the “Your New Country” section of this handbook.

- **If I am sick and can’t work, is that considered a vacation day?**
  - No, that is a sick day. Refer to the “Health” section of this handbook for more details.

- **My host family is traveling on a family vacation. Does this count as my vacation?**
  - No, your vacation is when you can leave on your own to take a vacation to do things you would like to do. While on your family’s vacation, you may still be working up to 45 hours and getting paid your weekly stipend. Before you join your host family on a vacation, be sure to clarify whether or not you would be using your personal vacation time.

- **My host family is traveling on business or fun and they need me to come along to work. Will I get my own private room?**
  - Host families should always supply a private room for the au pair per DOS regulations. A hotel suite with a door that can be closed for the au pair is acceptable. If the au pair chooses to join them for vacation and won’t be required to work, then the host family is not required to provide a separate room.

- **How much notice should I give my host family to request my own vacation?**
  - As all families have different careers and different vacation structures in their jobs, you should provide at least 2 months advance notice to allow the host family to make alternate childcare arrangements.
- **When is a good time to talk about my vacation with my host family?**
  - As soon as you start making plans. Schedule a meeting and bring a calendar to discuss possible dates with your host family. You want to make sure your host family doesn’t have any conflicts during the same time.

- **Can I save my 2 weeks until the end of my first year and leave early?**
  - Yes—if your host family agrees to it. This must be discussed between you and host family well in advance and needs to be mutually agreed between both of you. The host family will need to pay you the normal weekly stipend for those 2 weeks.

- **Can my friends, family or boyfriend visit me and can we travel around the USA?**
  - Yes, people can visit you in the United States. However please don’t expect your host family to accommodate your guests. Be respectful and thankful if your host family does invite anyone to stay in their home. Be sure your guests are polite and keep their personal belongings in your room if they do stay at your host family home.

- **What if I want to take more than 2 weeks or take it all at one time?**
  - The host family is only required to pay for 2 weeks vacation. You should not ask for more time than the 2 weeks. Taking more than 2 weeks at one time is also not possible as it is too difficult for a host family to arrange alternate childcare. You may also need to save a few days for anything that comes up unexpectedly.

- **Can I travel back home to visit my family from my home country?**
  - Yes, but you must have a current visa and DS-2019 signed for travel in order to reenter the U.S. You are responsible for paying for all expenses to visit home. You will not be able to re-enter the U.S. if your visa is not current as of your re-entry date. (See the “Travel” section of this handbook for more details.)
When Your Program Year Ends

Although a year seems like a long time when you arrive, you will be surprised how quickly your time in the United States will pass! As the end of your program year approaches, you have three options to consider:

- **First, you have the option to continue with your current host family and extend your stay** for an additional 6, 9, or 12 months after your first program year. Discuss this possibility with your host family and keep the lines of communication open.

- **Second, you may have the option to extend with a new family** if your current family does not want to participate in the Extension Program. Speak with your Area Director to be considered for “self-extending.” You can elect an additional 6, 9, or 12 months.

- **Third, you can decide to return to your home country** when your current program year ends.

Extending Your Program

**What Is the Extension Program?**

Au pairs can choose to extend their program for an additional 6, 9 or 12 months after their first program year ends. (You cannot extend for any other length of time.) Most au pairs extend with their current host family. You can also extend to match with a new family—perhaps your current host family does not want to participate in the extension program, or you want to experience life in a different part of the United States. Either way, the extension program provides a wonderful opportunity.

There are many benefits to extending your program, including:

- An additional educational stipend up to $500 from your host family
- Additional vacation days
- An increased discount to 15% off on all TrekAmerica trips
- The opportunity to complete more coursework and further improve your English
- The opportunity to spend more time with the friends you’ve made in the U.S.

Check *Au Pair Room* for the most updated benefits of extending.

**How to Extend Your Program**

Applying to extend your program is easy. Here are the basic steps:

- Go to *AuPairCare’s website* ([www.aupaircare.com](http://www.aupaircare.com)) and follow the extension paperwork instructions. Fill out the application and submit it with your *Coursework Completion Form* before your *extension deadline*.
  - AuPairCare recommends that you apply as soon as you complete your coursework, and do not wait until just before your extension deadline.
  - In the application, you will tell AuPairCare whether you are extending with your current host family or will try to rematch with a new host family for your extension period.
o Extension applications submitted without proof of coursework will not be submitted to the Department of State for approval.

- The Department of State’s extension application fee is the responsibility of the au pair. As of August 2009, the fee is approximately $246.

- If you are extending with your host family, your host parents need to read details about the Extension Program and fill out the Host Family Application in Family Room before the extension deadline. Applications cannot be accepted from either au pairs or host families after the extension deadline has passed.

- AuPairCare will submit your extension request to the Department of State.

- The Department of State will return an “approval” or “denial” within 30 days of AuPairCare’s submission of the request to the Department of State.

- AuPairCare will issue a new DS2019 form to you, which allows you to continue in the au pair program for the length of time requested.

The Department of State has very strict guidelines for the Extension Program:

- The application deadlines listed on AuPairCare’s website are non-negotiable. Late applications cannot be accepted.

- Au pairs can not apply for an extension unless they submit proof of completion of their educational requirement.

- You cannot shorten the length of your requested extension once you submit your application.

For full details on the extension program benefits, fees, and how to apply, please visit the “Extend Your Stay” page on the AuPairCare website. (http://www.aupaircare.com/au-pairs/extend-your-stay).

If you intend to renew your J-1 visa to enable international travel during your extension period, please apply for your extension as early as possible and read the J-1 Renewal section of this handbook very carefully.

**Returning Home**

**Travel Home**

You may choose not to extend your program year. If this is the case, you will need to request your return flight through Au Pair Room. Three months prior to the month your program ends, AuPairCare will send instructions to you on how to request your return flight.

AuPairCare must receive your return flight request form by the stated deadline—roughly 60 days prior to your program end month. When entering your travel dates on the Return Flight Request form, it is important to choose those dates carefully—you cannot change your travel dates once you have submitted your Return Flight Request. You will be able to select three possible travel dates between the last day of your official program and the last day of your 30-day “grace period.” AuPairCare cannot book travel dates that fall outside this range. AuPairCare tries to honor your
preferred date of travel; however we cannot guarantee that your requested date will be available. Please be flexible.

Once you submit your Return Flight Request, you may not change your requested dates. Once travel is booked for you, the flight cannot be changed.

You will have access to your return travel details in Au Pair Room 30 days prior to your departure date. You will not receive a paper airline ticket. You will need to download and print your electronic airline ticket (e-ticket) and itinerary from Au Pair Room.

Remember to reconfirm your flight with the airline 24 hours before your departure. Be sure your baggage weight is in compliance with the airline’s regulations, and arrive at the airport at least two hours before your departure time.

Saying goodbye to your host family

When it comes time to leave your host family, it will likely be an emotional good bye. You should try to reassure the children, explain that you will write and send pictures, and that you will remain in touch with them.

Remember all the wonderful memories that you made during your time in the U.S. and remind the children of all the fun you had together. Saying good bye will undoubtedly be difficult. Focus on the positive and remain in touch with your host family and the children once you return home.

Readjusting to life back in your home country

Returning home can be just as exciting as it was to arrive in the United States! You will get to see your friends and family after your time away and share your experiences with them.

It will be a happy time, but be prepared for “reverse culture shock.” Sometimes people who have lived abroad find their adjustment to returning home can be more difficult than their adjustment to a foreign culture. You know your home country, but you may not realize how much you have changed while being away. While living in a new culture in the United States, your perceptions, habits, and maybe even values have changed. This is a common occurrence, and the best way of addressing it is simply to be aware of the source of your negative feelings. In time you will be able to incorporate an appreciation for the positive aspects of both cultures.

Once you settle in back home, take time to send a postcard, email or phone your host family. They are undoubtedly missing you, and would love to hear how you are doing.
Travel

30-Day “Grace Period”

When you successfully complete your program, you will have a 30 day “grace period” to travel in the United States at the end of your program year before your visa requires you to leave the United States. If you decide to extend your program year for an additional 6, 9, or 12 months, your 30 day grace period will be moved to the end of your extended stay.

During the “grace period,” you are not allowed to work in the United States. You cannot travel internationally during the “grace period,” as your J-1 visa expires at the end of your 12th month in the United States. If you try to re-enter the U.S. after your J-1 visa expires, you will be denied entry. Thus, you must return to the U.S. from any international travel before the start of your “30-day grace period.”

Au pairs who do not successfully complete their full program year are not entitled to the 30-day grace period for travel. The Department of State requires these au pairs to return immediately to their home country. AuPairCare recommends that au pairs who did not complete their program schedule a return to their home country within 72 hours of leaving the program.

Travel in the United States

Many au pairs use their vacation or “grace period” to travel broadly in the United States. Need ideas on where to go? Check out these general travel books to learn about destinations throughout the United States:

- **Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) is a great resource for tips on low-cost travel throughout the United States
- **Rough Guides USA** ([http://www.roughguides.com/](http://www.roughguides.com/)) provides insider information on the “off the beaten path” approach throughout the United States

For general information to help plan your travels, these websites will be useful:

- The national train service is **AMTRAK** ([www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com)). Trains are a particularly cost-effective and convenient way to travel between major cities, especially on the East Coast.
- Bus service is another cost-effective travel option.
  - The major bus line is **Greyhound** ([www.greyhound.com](http://www.greyhound.com)), which serves nearly all cities and towns in the United States. You can buy tickets individually from one city to another, or you can purchase special passes. The Greyhound AmeriPass gives unlimited travel over consecutive days on Greyhound USA. The validity period of your pass is a continuous period of time commencing on the date the pass is first used. It is only valid for Monday-Thursday travel. Passes can be purchased at any Greyhound booth.
  - **MegaBus** ([www.megabus.com](http://www.megabus.com)) is another bus companies that offer inexpensive tickets. It operates in the northeast and midwest U.S. only.
- Online airfare and hotel bookings can be found using **www.orbitz.com**, **www.travelocity.com** and **www.kayak.com**.
There are many cost-effective resources available to help you stretch your travel budget. These include:

- **Green Tortoise** ([www.greentortoise.com](http://www.greentortoise.com)) Green Tortoise offers unique camping trips on buses that feature booths and couches that convert into beds at night.


- For last-minute get-aways at a major discount, check out websites such as [www.lastminutetravel.com](http://www.lastminutetravel.com), [www.hotwire.com](http://www.hotwire.com), and [www.priceline.com](http://www.priceline.com).

## Travel Outside the United States

International travel during your au pair program can be complicated, and for that reason AuPairCare recommends that au pairs avoid international travel when possible. If you have any questions regarding international travel, please contact AuPairCare at 415.434.8788.

The regulations of the au pair program prohibit travel outside the United States for more than 30 days during your au pair program. This limit is in effect even if you are accompanying your host family abroad and will be working for them abroad.

If you need an emergency flight home during your au pair program, please contact your insurance provider to find out if coverage is provided for your specific situation. If you need an emergency flight, do not book it yourself unless you have already spoken to your insurance provider and they have advised that your situation is not covered. (See “Health” section for insurance provider details.)

The insurance provided by AuPairCare is effective in all countries except your home country.

Before making any plans for international travel during your au pair year—including travel to Canada and Mexico—please make sure to first complete the following checklist. If you do not do all of these steps, you may not be allowed to re-enter the United States and you may have to return home permanently and unexpectedly.

- **Send your DS-2019 form to AuPairCare in San Francisco to be authorized for travel outside of the United States.**
  - If you do not see a signature and date in the “Travel Validation by Responsible Officer” box in the lower right corner of the DS-2019 form, please send your DS-2019 form with a letter outlining your dates of travel to: AuPairCare, Attn: Responsible Officer, 600 California Street, 10th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94108. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Please do not send your passport to AuPairCare.
  - Please allow up to 7-10 business days to be signed and sent back. If you need your form immediately, please include $20 so that AuPairCare can express mail your signed form to you. Alternately, you may bring your form in person to the San Francisco office for signature if you live nearby.
  - The travel validation signature is valid for one year. You do not need to have the form signed for each international trip.
- Check the J-1 visa inside your passport to make sure it will not expire prior to the date you plan to return to the U.S.
  - You will not be allowed to re-enter the United States if your visa has expired before the date you re-enter. If it has expired, you will have to make an appointment at a U.S. Embassy outside of the United States to have a new J-1 visa issued. There are no guarantees your visa will be approved at that time. Please contact AuPairCare at 415-434-8788 for more information about this process prior to your departure.
  - It is extremely important for au pairs to check the expiration date on their J-1 Visa before they plan a trip outside of the United States. The J-1 visa usually reflects the dates listed on the DS-2019 form. In some rare cases, the Embassy may issue the visa based on the au pair’s visa appointment date instead.

- Check the J-1 visa inside your passport to make sure that it states "M" for multiple entries.
  - This “M” means that you can enter and leave the United States multiple times as long as your visa has not expired and your travel takes place during the dates listed on your DS-2019 form.
  - If your J-1 visa is stamped "S" for single entry, you will not be able to travel outside of the United States during your program.

- Contact the local foreign embassy of the country where you intend to travel.
  - The embassy will provide you with information about any special visas you may need for travel to that country. You are responsible for requesting and securing any necessary visas. Be aware that this can be a lengthy process, so apply for any visas as early as possible. AuPairCare does not participate in this process.
  - For information on travel to Canada, visit http://www.cic.gc.ca
  - For information on travel to Mexico, visit http://www.mexonline.com/consulate.htm

- When you travel, be sure to bring all of the following:
  - your DS-2019 form that has been signed for travel
  - I-94 card, and
  - passport.
  Please make a photocopy of each document and keep them safely stored with you in case you happen to lose any of these important documents. This will make it easier to obtain replacements if needed.

- Do not travel outside of the United States beyond the dates listed on your DS-2019 form.
  - AuPairCare recommends that you complete all international travel prior to the start of the "30-day grace period" at the conclusion of your program. Your J-1 visa expires on the final day of your 12th month in the United States, and is not valid during the "grace period." You will not be allowed to re-enter the United States as of the first day of your "grace period."
Travel during Your Extension Period

General information

If it is necessary to travel outside of the U.S. during the extension term, host families and au pairs should read this section of the Au Pair Handbook together before planning the trip.

Remember that the extension application and the visa application are two distinct processes at the State Department. The J-1 visa allows entry into the United States, while the DS-2019 form lists the specific dates that the au pair is permitted to remain inside the United States. An extension year is valid based on the dates shown on the new DS-2019 form the au pair receives from AuPairCare when the extension is approved by the Department of State. This new DS-2019 form will be issued for the extension period without automatically issuing a new J-1 visa. The original J-1 visa expires at the end of the first program year.

This means that the Department of State has extended the time the au pair can remain in the United States. The Department of State has NOT extended the valid dates of the visa that allows re-entry to the United States.

If an au pair travels internationally during the extension period, the au pair must apply to renew their J-1 visa from outside the United States, usually in the home country. The au pair should plan the international travel specifically to accommodate the need to renew the J-1 visa during that trip. (Note that in the rare case that the au pair’s application for the new J-1 visa is denied, the au pair will not be able to return to the United States to begin the extension period.)

In the rare case of an emergency and/or sudden need to return home during the extension term (i.e. death/sickness of parent or relative), the au pair will need to visit the U.S. Embassy upon arrival in the home country in order to renew the J-1 Visa. The au pair cannot return to the United States until the J-1 visa is renewed. Au pairs who return home for an emergency are strongly encouraged to contact the U.S. Embassy for a visa renewal appointment as soon as they make plans to travel home. It can sometimes take a few weeks to obtain an appointment and interview at the U.S. Embassy. The appointment should be scheduled to occur within the first few days of the au pair’s return to the home country. Determining a date to return to the U.S. will depend on how long the au pair has to wait for his/her appointment at the embassy and whether a renewal J-1 Visa is issued.

Travel to Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean

Travel to Canada, Mexico or the Caribbean (except Cuba) for fewer than thirty days is allowed, even with an expired J-1 visa in your passport. This is known as "visa revalidation." The following conditions must apply in order for you to travel to these countries:

- You must have a J-1 visa (expired or valid) in your passport. If you lost your passport during your first year and had it replaced, you will not have the J-1 visa in that new passport and therefore cannot take advantage of travel to Canada, Mexico or the Caribbean.

- If you are a citizen of Syria, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, North Korea, Cuba, or Libya you are not eligible for visa revalidation. If you are a national of one of the above countries, you must always have a valid visa in your passport to enter the United States.
You are allowed to travel to only one of the destinations named above and for fewer than thirty days. For example, you cannot use automatic revalidation to enter Canada, depart to another country, return to Canada, and then return to the U.S. within 30 days.

You must have:
- An unexpired I-94 card indicating your J-1 status in your passport when you enter the U.S. Do not surrender the I-94 card when you leave the U.S. If you do, you will not be eligible for visa revalidation.
- Your DS-2019 form with your extension program dates.
- A passport valid at least six months after the date you return to the U.S.

You should not apply to renew your J-1 visa while in Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean. If you apply for the J-1 visa during your visit to one of these destinations, you must wait for it to be issued before you return. If your visa application is denied by the American Consulate, you will not be allowed to use automatic revalidation to return to the U.S. Instead, you will be required to travel directly to your country of citizenship to apply for a new visa.

You may be required to have a tourist visa to enter the foreign country you are visiting. The visa you have for the United States does not automatically grant entry into these countries. We recommend that you check with the consulate of the country you are visiting before you travel. Below are the commonly requested Canadian and Mexican consulate websites: [http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/index.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/index.asp) or [http://www.sre.gob.mx/boston/](http://www.sre.gob.mx/boston/) (Click on visas/tourist visa and information will be in English.)

The decision to allow an au pair back into the U.S. is at the discretion of the immigration officer at the port of entry. AuPairCare cannot guarantee reentry into the United States and will not be responsible for any costs incurred due to reentry problems.

AuPairCare recommends that if you choose to travel under the “automatic revalidation of visa” rule, that you print and carry with you the [U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Automatic Revalidation Fact Sheet](http://www.cbp.gov) in case the border officer is not familiar with the details of the rule.

For more information, refer to [U.S. Department of State Public Notice: Change in Automatic Revalidation of Visa Benefit](http://www.state.gov).

## Renewing Your J-1 Visa

### Risks to Consider

If you must travel outside of the U.S. during the extension year, you must renew your J-1 visa. This is a separate process from applying for your extension. Before renewing your J-1 visa, please understand that:

- AuPairCare cannot guarantee the renewal of a J-1 Visa. Although it is rare, any au pair who attempts to renew the J-1 visa risks the possibility of being denied the visa renewal. Even though an au pair has been approved by the U.S. Department of State to participate in the Extension Program, the decision to renew the J-1 visa is at the discretion of the U.S. Embassy officer who interviews the au pair. AuPairCare has no influence over this process.
• AuPairCare is not responsible for any costs incurred by the au pair or host family due to a denial or delay in renewing the J-1 visa.

• AuPairCare recommends that the au pair renews the J-1 visa at the U.S. Embassy in the home country. If an au pair tries to renew the J-1 visa in a country other than the home country and is denied, the au pair may not be able to re-enter the U.S. The au pair will be responsible for making arrangements and covering all costs incurred to return to her/his home country and to ship belongings from the U.S. to the home country.

For more information about extending your visa, please contact AuPairCare’s Client Services department at 1-800-428-7247.

Suggested Timeline for Coordinating Extension and J-1 Visa Applications

If you plan to renew your J-1 visa, you should apply for your extension well before your final extension deadline. This will enable you to have enough time to receive approval of your extension, apply for your new J-1 visa while in your home country and return to the U.S. – all before your original J-1 visa expires. This timing provides a “safety net” so that if your application to renew the J-1 visa is denied, you can try to re-enter the United States with your original J-1 visa while it is still current. A very small number of visa renewal requests are denied, so make sure you have the “back-up plan” to re-enter the U.S. before your original visa expires.

• As early in your program year as possible, complete your coursework so that you can apply for your extension. You must have completed your coursework by the end of the 11th month of your program in order to be eligible to extend. (Many extension au pairs complete the 60 hours requirement before their courses have actually finished, and can apply to extend once the 60 hours of class time have been completed.) Check Au Pair Room for your specific extension deadline, and apply as soon as you complete your coursework.

• Submit your extension application as soon as you complete your coursework. It is critical to apply as soon as possible because the au pair’s extension request must be approved by the Department of State and the au pair must receive the new DS-2019 form before the au pair can apply in person at the U.S. Embassy abroad to renew the J-1 visa.

• As soon as you submit your extension application, call to schedule your U.S. Embassy appointment in your home country. Schedule it to take place in the first few days of your visit.
  o Contact information for U.S. Embassies abroad can be found at http://U.S.embassy.state.gov. It is the au pair’s responsibility to make this appointment. AuPairCare cannot set up an appointment for an au pair and has no ability to affect scheduling appointments at the U.S. Embassy.
  o Call to make this appointment well before you leave the United States. The wait for an appointment can be several weeks, and varies based on time of year and demand at that specific U.S. Embassy. Visa wait times can be found at this website: http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/tempvisitors_wait.php
  o By scheduling your appointment as soon as you arrive in your home country, you will likely have time for a follow-up appointment in case your visa is denied at first. If you wait until the end of your trip for your visa appointment and your visa
request is denied, you will not have time to appeal the denial at a second interview before your scheduled flight back to the United States.

- **Schedule your international travel dates** so that you depart after you are likely to receive your new DS-2019 form and return before your original J-1 visa expires. If you have access to flexible airline ticketing (e.g. frequent flier miles), it is a good time to have a flexible ticket.

- **Wait up to 30 days (one month) for the Department of State to approve your extension.** AuPairCare will send you your new DS-2019 form as soon as the Department of State has approved your extension. It will show the dates of your original program year and the dates for the extension period you requested (6, 9 or 12 months.)

- **As soon as you receive your new DS-2019 form, you may travel back to your home country.** Be sure to bring all of the following with you so that you can provide them at your embassy appointment:
  - Your original DS-2019 form signed for travel
  - The new DS-2019 form that AuPairCare sent to the au pair after the Department of State approved the extension
  - Passport
  - I-94 card
  - A written letter from your host family stating the nature of your commitment to them as an au pair
  - Pictures of you with your host family
  - Copies of your educational completion certificates
  - Funds for payment of the visa renewal fee. This fee is the au pair’s responsibility, and varies according to country. Check your U.S. Embassy website for details.
  - Your original J-1 visa
  - Other documents may be required for the appointment. Check the U.S. Embassy website for details.

- **Conduct your visa appointment at the U.S. embassy in your home country.**
  - Be sure to bring all of the documents listed above to the appointment. You do not need to bring a “SEVIS receipt.”
  - Be on time, be professional, and be prepared. This is a serious interview that will determine whether you are allowed to re-enter the United States.

- **If your visa is denied, schedule an appeal appointment before you leave the U.S. Embassy office from your first interview.**
  - Schedule the appeal interview for as soon as possible, even if it means you need to adjust the plans you have in place for your visit at home.
  - Ask the Consular Officer if there are additional documents you should bring to your visa appeal, such as bank documentation or class registration
  - It is solely at the discretion of the officer at the U.S. Embassy to grant the renewal J-1 Visa. AuPairCare has no control over denied renewal J-1 visas. J-1 visa denials do not occur often, but are a risk. This is why AuPairCare strongly recommends that an au pair schedules the return flight to the United States to occur before the original J-1 Visa expires in the renewal J-1 visa is denied.

- **When your visa has been successfully renewed, email your host family and Area Director immediately to let them know.**

- **Travel back to the United States on time.**
An au pair who is re-entering the United States close to the expiration date of the original J-1 visa may be stopped for questioning by U.S. Customs. Thus, extension au pairs returning to the U.S. within 30 days of the expiration date of the original J-1 visa should show the new DS-2019 form to the airport government officer. This proves that the Department of State has already approved the au pair for an extended stay within the U.S. and shows the dates of the approved extension period.

If the au pair successfully renewed the J-1 visa before attempting to return to the U.S., the au pair should not have issues when re-entering the United States.
Your Official Documents

This section provides you with helpful information about au pair related matters concerning visa documents, Social Security, driver’s licenses, insurance, travel and online resources. AuPairCare recommends that au pairs make copies of all important documents and stores them in a safe place in your host family’s home.

DS-2019 Form

1. What is the DS-2019 form?

The DS-2019 form is also referred to as the “Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor J-1 Status.” It is issued by the Department of State to provide evidence that AuPairCare is the sponsoring agency and to outline the au pair’s program dates. Au pairs use this form when applying for the J-1 visa in their home country prior to arrival.

Your DS-2019 form looks like this:


Please send an email to customercare@aupaircare.com to request a replacement DS-2019 form. Please be sure to include your name and phone number in the email. You may also call 1-800-428-7247 and ask to speak to the Au Pair Services Department.

3. I have moved. How do I update my DS-2019 form to reflect my host family’s new address?
Please send an email to customercare@aupaircare.com requesting an updated DS-2019 form. Please be sure to include your name and phone number in the email. You may also call 1-800-428-7247 and ask to speak to the Au Pair Services Department.

4. I am planning to travel outside of the United States. What do I need to do with my DS-2019 form?

Your original DS-2019 form needs to be signed authorizing travel by a staff member in the AuPairCare San Francisco office before you travel outside of the U.S. Please send your original DS-2019 form (but not your passport) to the following address:

Attention: Responsible Officer
AuPairCare, Inc.
600 California St, 10th floor
San Francisco, CA 94108

If you are leaving the U.S. in less than three weeks, please include a check or money order for $20 with your DS-2019 form. Your signed form will be express mailed back to you. Refer to AuPairCare’s website for further information about traveling outside of the U.S at: http://aupaircare.com/au-pairs/current-au-pairs/travel-outside-the-us.

If you are an extension au pair, please refer to the following before making any travel plans outside of the U.S: http://aupaircare.com/assets/Extension_Program_Travel_Info.pdf.

I-94 Card

1. What is the I-94 card?

The I-94 card, also known as the “Arrival/Departure Document,” serves as the registration form for individuals admitted to the U.S. as non-immigrants. This small white card is usually stapled to your passport when you go through Immigration upon arrival to the U.S. To read Frequently Asked Questions about I-94 card, visit http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/i-94_instructions/arrival_departure_record.xml

Your I-94 card looks like this:

![I-94 Card Image]

2. I lost my I-94 card. How do I obtain a new one?

Please refer to the following website for information on how to obtain an I-94 card: http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/i-94_instructions/arrival_departure_record.xml
To replace a lost I-94 card, you will need to fill out the I-102, Application for Replacement/Initial Nonimmigrant Arrival-Departure Document ([http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-102.pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-102.pdf)). If you require further assistance, contact your local immigration office. A list of offices can be found at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov). To make an appointment at an immigration office to replace your I-94 card, visit the INFOPASS website ([http://www.infopass.uscis.gov/](http://www.infopass.uscis.gov/)).

3. There is a mistake on my I-94 card. How do I correct it?

Please refer to the following website for information on how to correct an I-94 card: [http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/i-94_instructions/arrival_departure_record.xml](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/i-94_instructions/arrival_departure_record.xml)

Mistakes on an I-94 card may be corrected by a Deferred Inspection Site or a Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) office located within an international airport. To find a CBP office, visit [http://www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov). The au pair should call his/her closest international airport and ask to speak to the Customs and Border Patrol (CPB) office to set up an appointment. If the CBP office does not make corrections to I-94 cards, ask to speak to the Deferred Inspection Site office. Remember to bring your DS-2019 form, J-1 Visa, Passport, and I-94 card. It may take several weeks for you to receive your new or corrected I-94 card.

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**Passport and J-1 Visa**

1. My passport including my J-1 Visa is lost. How do I replace it?

First, contact the local embassy or consulate for your country of citizenship for information on how to replace a lost or stolen passport. A list of embassies/consulates in the United States can be found at [http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm).


General information about replacing lost or stolen passports and visas can be found at: [http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/info/info_2009.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/info/info_2009.html)

2. I want to replace the lost J-1 Visa that was in my passport. Can I replace it in the USA?

No, J-1 visas cannot be replaced in the United States. To replace your J-1 visa, you must apply in person at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your home country. Contact a U.S. Embassy abroad for further information: [http://usembassy.state.gov/](http://usembassy.state.gov/).

3. What is the difference between the J-1 visa in my passport and my DS-2019 form?

J-1 visa in your passport allows you **entry** into the United States. Once your J-1 visa expires, you should not travel outside of the U.S. as you will not be allowed to re-enter. The DS-2019 form is the document that authorizes you to **remain** in the United States legally within the program dates listed on the form.

For general information about your J-1 visa, visit the Exchange Visitors J-1 General Visa Information website: [http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1267.html#long](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1267.html#long)
4. **What does my J-1 Visa look like?**

Your J-1 visa is inside your passport, and was stamped by the Customs Officer when you arrived in the United States. It looks like this:

![J-1 Visa Image]

**Social Security Card (SSN)**

1. **Which Social Security office should I visit?**

Ask your Area Director for the address of the closest Social Security office. You can also contact the Social Security Administration (SSA) directly via [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) or by calling 1-800-772-1213.

2. **What documents should I bring with me to the Social Security office?**

Plan to bring the following documents with you when applying for your Social Security card:
- Passport
- J-1 Visa (inside your passport)
- I-94 card
- DS-2019 form
- Letter from AuPairCare with “Attention US Social Security” written at the top (This letter was provided to you at Au Pair Academy.)

3. **I went to the Social Security office and was not allowed to get a Social Security card. Why?**

If you encounter a problem when applying for a Social Security card, please find out the reason your request was denied. In some cases, a manager at the Social Security office may be able to assist you in resolving the problem. Contact your Area Director if you still need assistance.

There are two common reasons why an au pair may not have been issued Social Security Card.

- Your documents may have conflicting information.
  - Check all of your documents (Passport, Visa, I-94 card, and DS-2019 form) to ensure they are consistent and accurate.
  - If one of your documents has incorrect information (for example your I-94 card does not list your full last name), please refer to the I-94 section above.

- The Social Security officer says that your documents do not match their records.
It is likely that a data entry error was made by Immigration when you entered the U.S. Please request that the Social Security officer contacts the Department of Homeland Security to verify your information using the SEVIS system. You should complete an application for a Social Security card that is placed on hold until Social Security has verified your information. It may take several weeks until you receive your Social Security card.

**State Driver's License**

1. **Which Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office should I visit to get my license?**

Ask your Area Director for the location of the closest DMV.

2. **What documents will I need to apply for my driver's license?**

Bring your passport, DS-2019 form and I-94 card. Other required documents vary from state to state. Some DMV offices require that the au pair bring a document listing his/her U.S. address. Verify the necessary documents through your Area Director and/or the DMV website for your state before visiting the office.

3. **I was not allowed to get a Driver's License. What do I do?**

If you encounter a problem when applying for a driver’s license, please find out the reason your request was denied. In some cases, a manager at the DMV may be able to assist you in resolving the problem. Contact your Area Director if you still need assistance.

**Health Insurance Card**

1. **Where can I find health insurance information?**

Please read the “Health” section of this handbook, or visit AuPairCare’s insurance webpage: [http://aupaircare.com/au-pairs/current-au-pairs/insurance](http://aupaircare.com/au-pairs/current-au-pairs/insurance)

2. **I lost my health insurance card. What do I do?**

Please visit [www.travelinsure.com/partners/aupaircare](http://www.travelinsure.com/partners/aupaircare) to download a replacement card, locate USI Insurance coverage details, claim information and to locate a physician who is a Preferred Provider in your area.
Placement Changes

In some cases, even the best efforts of the au pair and host family to ensure the success of the placement do not result in a sustainable placement. In these cases, Au Pair Care can assist both the host family and the au pair in finding a more suitable match.

Before a Placement Change

Before AuPairCare can consider a request for a placement change, the host family and au pair need to be able to show that they have made their best effort to make the current placement successful. This includes:

60-Day Transition Period

AuPairCare strongly encourages au pairs and host families to allow for a 60 day (two month) adjustment period before requesting a placement change. After the first 60 days of a placement, an au pair or host family can request a placement change. In rare instances, senior management of AuPairCare may approve a change during the first 60 days of the placement.

Mediation

If a problem persists or becomes more serious despite your efforts to address it with your host family, your Area Director will work with you to try to improve the situation. Either you or your host family may ask the Area Director for assistance working through any issues.

Your Area Director will most likely come to the host family home for a “mediation” meeting with you and your host parents together. During the mediation meeting, be prepared to speak calmly and openly about your concerns. Use specific examples to illustrate challenges or your efforts to address your host family’s concerns about your behavior. Try to keep your emotions under control and do not place blame. Instead, suggest solutions when you can.

Professionalism

While you work with your Area Director to mediate issues, you must remain professional, committed and productive within your current host family. Your childcare duties must still remain your main focus and you need to be pleasant and cooperative with your host family.

It is never acceptable to leave your host family’s home on short notice, without your Area Director’s approval. Doing so will result in your termination from the au pair program—you will be immediately terminated from the program, your visa will be canceled, and will have return immediately to your home country at your own cost.

You must also always remain in contact with your Area Director and return her calls promptly during a time of placement change.

Before you can rematch, AuPairCare will carefully re-evaluate your childcare skills, judgment, driving skills, and commitment to the program before determining whether you are eligible to rematch. Your conduct at the end of your current placement will help to determine whether AuPairCare can provide a new host family for you.
During a Placement Change

This time of transition can be challenging not only for au pairs, but also for host families. Throughout a transition you should be sensitive to the challenges a placement change creates for your host family and remain respectful of their needs and efforts to coordinate a replacement caregiver. If you are in a placement change situation, the following information will be useful:

**Housing stipend**

If the host family is willing to house the au pair in transition until the au pair re-matches with a new host family, and the au pair is not willing to stay with the family, the au pair will be charged a $25/day housing stipend. The au pair will pay this stipend directly to the party who provides housing, typically an AuPairCare Area Director. The maximum stay is two weeks (14 days), during which time the au pair must either re-match with a new family or make plans to return home.

If the family requests that the au pair be removed from their home immediately, they will be charged a $25/day housing stipend for up to two weeks (14 days maximum) or until the au pair has been placed elsewhere, whichever comes first.

**Financial obligations**

Au pairs are responsible for paying any outstanding debts to the family they are leaving before they leave the home. This includes telephone bills and any other outstanding debts. The Area Director is available to the au pair and family to facilitate repayment. AuPairCare requires au pairs to pay all debts owed to their family and reserves the right to withhold the Completion Bonus if the au pair does not repay debts to the host family.

Host families are responsible for paying the au pair any stipend or vacation owed to the au pair as of the last day of service to the host family. Payment must be provided to the au pair on the last day of service.

**Re-matching**

AuPairCare does not guarantee au pairs that a replacement family will be found for them. AuPairCare will assist the au pair in re-matching for two weeks by circulating the au pair application to prospective families. If the au pair does not re-match within the two weeks, the au pair must return to the home country immediately.

Below are some specific guidelines for au pairs hoping to re-match with a new host family:

- Au pairs who are smokers are not eligible for re-match.
- Au pairs in the process of trying to re-match with a new host family must be easily available via phone and email. This enables AuPairCare’s In-Country Matching Expert to connect them with interested host families, who often have an urgent need to choose an au pair.
- Au pairs may not plan extended trips and vacations during the time they are trying to re-match. Speak to your Area Director if you have any questions.
- Au pairs cannot select a specific geographic location for the new match. Au pair applications will be circulated with families nationwide.
- Au pairs may not request specific perks from host families with whom they interview, including use of a car, cell phone, personal TV, or a specific work schedule. Au pairs
who do pursue these requests with potential host families may be removed from circulation before the end of the two-week rematch period.

- Au pairs with limited childcare skills, limited English skills or non-drivers will be more difficult to re-match. AuPairCare may circulate these applications to a limited number of host families.
- AuPairCare reserves the right to update an au pair’s childcare experience and share her application with all or some of the host families willing to consider au pairs who are in re-match.

**Program dismissal**

If AuPairCare determines that an au pair is no longer qualified for participation in the program, or AuPairCare is unable to find a qualified au pair a replacement family within a two week period of a match break:

- The au pair will be required to leave the United States immediately, and forfeits the privilege of a 30 day “grace period” to travel in the U.S. before leaving the country.
- The au pair will be responsible for all associated expenses, including international travel.
- The au pair will forfeit the Program Completion Bonus.
- AuPairCare will end its sponsorship of the au pair’s J-1 visa.
- AuPairCare will end the au pair’s health insurance coverage.

**“Grace Period” for Early Departures**

Au pairs who end their program year early for any reason are not entitled to a grace period of 30 days to leave the United States. This “30 day grace period” benefit is reserved for au pairs who have successfully completed their full program year. Au pairs who are dismissed or who are voluntarily leaving the program early must make plans to return home immediately upon leaving the au pair program.