

## Do's & Don'ts for Hosting International Students At Thanksgiving

### Before the Event

- Do pray for your guests before they come that the Lord would guide the conversation.
- Do learn some things about your guests' countries and cultures
  - Read in Operation World or [www.cia.gov/library/publication/the-world-factbook](http://www.cia.gov/library/publication/the-world-factbook)
  - Read about any recent world news about their countries
  - If you have small children...have them look up the flag of each country and make pictures of them to post.
  - Suggest to your children questions they could ask (esp. about children their age in the student's country)
  - Find their country on the map (If they are from Taiwan, don't ask where in Africa do you come from!!!)
- Don't assume your guest will agree with everything you read in publications.
  - Use these resources to know how to ask intelligent questions. (E.g. I read that your country has had some bad weather, has it affected your family? I heard there was some unrest in your country, what do you think will happen?)
  - Don't get into a political argument. If one starts, politely suggest you table the discussion for another time.
- Do greet your guest as an honored guest.
  - Ask how guest pronounce their name and what they would like to be called. Have a paper and pen ready to write names and other words.
  - Don't make up a "nickname" for them...let them offer nicknames themselves.
  - Ask intro questions: (What are you studying? What surprised you when you came to this country? What family do you have at home? What do you miss about your country/home?)
  - Ask open-ended questions. (What other areas of the US would you like to visit, why? If I were to visit your country, what places would you recommend I visit?)

### The Event

- Do explain to your guests why we celebrate Thanksgiving and what special things you do to observe the day.
- Give a simple explanation of what is going to happen (e.g. prayer, sharing something for which you are thankful) and tell them what their response should be (e.g. share something you are thankful for or merely hold up your hand to indicate that you don't want to share).
- Do Not initiate events (e.g. reading the Bible at the table) for your guest's benefit. If you do it regularly, then do it with your guests. (They are eavesdroppers on your holiday observance.)

### Communication

- Do remember that English is probably a second language for your guest.
  - **Make a point of speaking slowly and distinctly. Only speak louder if your guest has difficulty hearing.**
  - Put your guest at ease regarding language. Tell them it is okay to interrupt if they don't understand.
  - Do tell them that no matter how poor their English is, it is better than your ability to speak their language.
  - Avoid using idioms...or if you do, ask your guest if they understand the idiom.
  - If your guest doesn't understand, use simpler words and say things in another way.
  - Your guest will usually appreciate your help in improving his/her English.
  - Be a thoughtful listener.
- Don't yell if your guest doesn't understand... his problem is not ignorance or hearing loss but one of vocabulary.
- Have a device nearby so you can use Google (e.g. We were trying to talk about a squirrel and the student didn't know the word...Google provided an instant picture).

### Cultural Exchange

- Do ask questions about the guest's family, country, and customs.
  - What holidays do you celebrate? How do you celebrate them?
  - How does the food here differ from what you eat at home?
  - How do couples meet? How is a wedding done?
- Don't ask questions that would provide an uncomfortable comparison.
  - How big is your house compared to this one?
  - How many people in your country have two cars?

### Sharing your faith

- **Don't proselytize!** Your guest was invited to share your Thanksgiving Dinner, not to be preached at. (See 1 Peter 3:15).
- Do (if it seems right) ask your guest to share how his/her family or country practices religion.
- Feel free to share about **your** faith and church as a "cultural exchange" and let the Holy Spirit work in their heart.

### During the day

- Offer them a beverage whenever they're in your home (Many will opt for water *without* ice.)
- Have your student practice his/her name for you until you can say it correctly. Ask what he/she prefers to be called (don't Americanize their name).
- If you have pets, show them how you relate to your pets and tell them your "pet rules." Many cultures do not have pets in the house. You may need to put your pet in another room.
- If they're interested, let them see how you cook the meal. (They may want to help.)
- Share pictures of your family and your vacations.
- Take pictures together.
- Explain any family customs you have for holidays.
- Don't shy away from any traditions you have as a family. Be authentic.
- For some cultures it is impolite to ask for more food or "help yourself." For others, it is polite to turn down the first offer of something. Help them understand what is polite in America.
- Watch to see what foods they particularly like and offer to send some home. Have containers on hand which need not be returned.
- Tell your guests about your various dishes. Be ready to share recipes. Some of the holiday foods that Americans look forward to may be too sweet or taste strangely to those for whom they are new.
- Many cultures (e.g. Chinese) don't eat/drink cold things such as ice water or ice cream. Make sure that you have hot tea available.
- Muslims do not drink alcohol (even in a dessert, etc.) or eat pork. Hindus are generally vegetarians.
- If you have learned about their country/culture, say, "I've read that \_\_\_\_\_. Is that correct?" Even if you have reliable information, not everyone from a country sees their culture the same way. Be a learner.
- Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in spiritual conversations—some people from other faiths or cultures are eager to learn about Christianity, while others are just hoping to have an "American experience." Friendship and acceptance communicate the love of Christ.
- Avoid political conversation unless your guest initiates it. If your guests are from different countries, they also might not agree on politics (e.g. if one is from Syria and the other from Israel!).
- Enjoy yourself but remember that humor does not always translate well. However, be aware most internationals would like to understand American humor. Explaining a joke may ruin the humor but is a good opportunity to share language and culture.

### Following the dinner or event

- When inviting your guest to a future event, give him/her an easy way to refuse—for many cultures, they may feel pressured to do what you suggest because they now feel obligated to you. For example, say, "Would you like to join us next week at \_\_\_\_\_ or do you have too much work to do?"
- Make arrangements before your guest departs for when you will see your new friend(s) again. Further contact is optional!
- Invite to plays, concerts, movies, and discuss their reaction afterward. These don't have to be expensive events (e.g. a high school basketball game rather than the NBA)
- Invite them to future holiday celebrations like the Christmas, birthday parties, or a trip to an Outlet Mall. If there seems to be openness, invite them to visit your church with you...as a cultural exposure (Your prayers can make it more that that!)
- If a spiritual discussion has occurred, they may want you to visit their religious service. Be open.
- If they offer, let them cook for you next time at your home. They may not have enough dishes to have you to their apartment.
- Always let the student know ahead of time if there will be a Christian talk or discussion at any future events.
- If they are expected to pay for any of the events, let them know how much beforehand and considering offering to pay for them. Some come from wealthy families and have significant resources...some are just scraping by.
- Check [www.interculturalfriends.blogspot.com](http://www.interculturalfriends.blogspot.com) for other activities you can invite them to or join with your international friend