



PO BOX 71570

London

E6 9LS

Tel: +44 (0) 207 998 3445

Email: info@ukguests.co.uk Website: www.ukguests.co.uk

UKguests Handbook for Homestay Hosts



Contents

1	Who are UKguests?	4
1.1	What is homestay?	4
1.2	Why do students choose homestay?.....	4
2.	The role of a host.....	5
2.1	What does the host gain from the experience?	5
2.2	Room and board.....	5
2.3	Transportation.....	5
2.4	Companionship.....	5
2.5	Help with English	6
3.	What a host is not expected to provide	6
3.1	Financial assistance	6
3.2	Housing for visiting relatives or friends	6
4.	Behaviour and expectations	6
4.1	Courtesy	6
4.2	Consistency.....	6
4.3	Self-reliance.....	6
4.4	Curfew times	6
5.	In your home	7
5.1	Your student's living space	7
5.2	A tour of the house.....	7
5.3	Food.....	7
5.4	Communication	7
5.5	Setting house rules	7
5.6	Mail and luggage	7
5.7	Telephone and Internet use	8
5.8	Hot water, heating and lighting	8
5.9	Culture shock and dealing with homesickness	8
5.10	Religious practices and beliefs.....	8
6.	Understanding different attitudes to hygiene and personal habits.....	9
7.	Language skills.....	9
7.1	Level of English	9
7.2	Helping students to practise English.....	9
8.	Student checklist guideline.....	9
9	Students' health and welfare	10
9.1	Medical treatment /GP services	10
9.2	General welfare	10
9.3	School attendance	10
9.4	Opening a bank account.....	10

9.5	Change of homestay details	11
9.6	Safeguarding students under 18	11
10.	Laws that affect you as a host	12
10.1	Data Protection Act	12
10.2	Department for Work and Pensions.....	12
10.3	Capital Gains Tax	12
10.4	Rent Acts	12
10.5	Fire precautions, health & safety.....	12
10.6	Gas safety	12
10.7	Race relations	13
11.	Top tips for successful hosting	13

WELCOME

Welcome to your hosting experience with UKguests. This handbook is intended to provide you with a good understanding of your role as a host, and to help you manage and enjoy this cross-cultural experience. It is our hope that it will answer most of your questions and anticipate your concerns. Nevertheless, it is impossible to predict every situation and we urge you to contact UKguests to discuss any issues that you feel need clarifying.

1 Who are UKguests?

UKguests are an organisation founded in 2005 in the United Kingdom (UK). We offer students and visitors a first-class homestay accommodation service. Through much research and our personal experience of hosting international students, we are aware of the needs and preferences of the students who come to the UK to study, and understand the importance of their homestay environment.

We take great care when placing our guests with our British hosts, who love to share their culture and home with their overseas guests. We endeavour to provide a service to students/guests that is second to none.

We hope that the information provided here will help to establish a friendly relationship between you, your students/guests and UKguests.

1.1 What is homestay?

Homestay is a living arrangement where families and/or single people offer a student/guest a private room in their home for a short period of time. This is typically from one week to three months, depending on the nature of the visit. Some guests choose to stay for a longer period of time, which may sometimes extend for up to a year. Long-term guests are usually completing a degree, studying an intense English language course, or on a work internship/placement.

Homestay accommodation is generally requested by English language schools and universities, who offer their international students a package of English language lessons and homestay accommodation, as this helps to improve their English. In addition, they also have the opportunity to experience the British way of life and form new friendships with hosts and other guests, often for many years to come.

1.2 Why do students choose homestay?

There are many different options available to international students when they choose to study in the UK. These include homestay, halls of residence, hostels, student house shares, hotels and many more.

International students who choose to live with a host over other options want to integrate into a **home away from home** environment. Here they have the opportunity to live within a typical British home, experience our culture and have further opportunities to practise their English.

Hosting an international student is more similar to fostering or accommodating an exchange student than renting a room to a lodger. However, hosting should not disrupt the normal routine of your home life. Students will want to integrate into the normal running of your family home. Many schools will arrange excursions or activities for students on weekends, so hosts are not necessarily expected to arrange this. However, it is still advisable to include your student/guest in as many aspects of family life as possible.

2. The role of a host

Your commitment to being a host means providing a house and home to your student/guest. Exact arrangements may vary depending on the student and host, although there are some basic expectations.

2.1 What does the host gain from the experience?

Through hosting an international student, you and your family will form a new friendship, and gain knowledge and understanding of a new culture. You may experience new food and customs and may also even have the opportunity to learn the basics of a new language. Children in the family could learn from a new 'big brother' or 'sister', who may be able to help them with their schoolwork.

The long-lasting relationship that we hope develops between the host and the student/guest can lead to an on-going exchange of friendship and hospitality. Students often express their gratitude to their hosts by inviting them to visit their homes and families in their own country. Children especially benefit from having a 'pen pal' in another country. A deeper understanding of a different culture may spark new interests in travel and international issues.

The benefits of hosting an international student are endless. In addition to meeting students from all over the world, hosts will also benefit from having an experienced and active UKguests team to rely on for advice and help with any issues. You will receive prompt payments every two weeks. You will also benefit from the safety of being introduced to an international student by a reliable and reputable provider, rather than having to host an unknown private lodger or tenant. Finally, you have the flexibility of choosing short or long-term students.

2.2 Room and board

All students should have their own room unless you have been specifically asked for two students to share a room. Board includes whatever meal plan has been agreed between UKguests and you as the host. Room and board should be provided for the duration of the commitment you have made with UKguests.

2.3 Transportation

Students usually arrive during a weekend. If students arrive on a weekday, we advise them in advance to plan carefully, as many of our hosts work and are not generally available to welcome them into their home until around 7pm.

We will endeavour to inform you of their flight arrival time and which airport they will be arriving at. Under normal circumstances you will not be required to collect your student from the airport, train or tube station, as they will usually arrange their own transport or will have transport arranged for them by UKguests or their language school.

There may be occasions when you would be asked to meet your student at a central location close to your home when we have large group bookings.

2.4 Companionship

The host is the student's substitute family and an integral part of their stay in the UK. The hosts' presence, particularly in the early weeks, will help the student feel at home and will soothe any feelings of anxiety, insecurity and homesickness.

Students look forward to a genuine family living experience, to being included in family life and living with people who are interested in everything about them. Your student/guest may look to you for the kind of family interaction and relationship s/he has with his/her natural family. This could mean sharing and discussing daily routines, activities, ideas and feelings. Please keep in mind that your student/guest is eager to learn from and contribute to your family. Thus your friendship, acceptance and curiosity about their country and culture are important.

As time passes, your student/guest will feel increasingly at ease in your home. With this security, the student/guest will be able to develop more independent relationships outside your family. The goal is to create a balanced experience for you and the student, in terms of family time, social interaction and private time.

2.5 Help with English

Students are usually very eager to improve their English and look forward to practising with their host. We hope that one or more members of your family would like to help your student/guest with English by encouraging conversation. This also means being willing to politely correct their English, rather than always accepting whatever your student/guest says. You are very likely to develop an understanding of how much input is wanted and when. (Some students prefer to be corrected in private.)

3. What a host is not expected to provide

3.1 Financial assistance

Beyond the expenses involved in providing room and board, and whatever extra entertainment the hosts may want to offer, all other financial obligations are the students' responsibility. This includes train, tube and/or bus fares, cinema tickets, other leisure expenses, and the cost of clothing and personal items.

The host is not responsible for the student's foreign or domestic telephone calls. It is therefore important to establish, early in the stay, a specific procedure for your student's use of your telephone, particularly with regard to long-distance calls. The use of an international calling card is recommended.

3.2 Housing for visiting relatives or friends

Hosts are under no obligation to provide hospitality for the student's friends or relatives. If you do offer to house your student's friend or relative, be sure to specify an amount of time for the visit. Do not hesitate to say 'no' if the visit would be inconvenient for you and/or your family.

4. Behaviour and expectations

4.1 Courtesy

We strongly emphasize to students/guests that your home is not a hotel and should not be treated as such. This means that students are expected to communicate politely and respectfully, to inform you about daily and weekend plans and activities, and to offer to help with household tasks. They must be willing to conform to your customs, schedule, household routines and expectations concerning quiet time.

4.2 Consistency

You should receive a booking confirmation from UKguests prior to the arrival of your student. You have the right to expect that the information we provide is accurate. UKguests provides the host with all information given by the student and/or school.

4.3 Self-reliance

No matter how old s/he is, your student will definitely need some help, especially at the beginning of his/her stay. Please be prepared to spend some extra time just explaining things.

4.4 Curfew times

Students over the age of 18 should not be expected to observe a curfew. However, out of courtesy, they should inform you of their whereabouts and the time they are planning to come home, especially if staying out late or overnight. They can also be expected to observe quiet times, limiting visitors and other potentially noisy activities to certain hours, so as not to disturb the family.

It is at the discretion of the host to determine whether door keys will be given to students aged 16–17. Students under 16 should not be given keys to the home.

UKguests' curfew times for students aged 16–17 is 10pm, unless otherwise stated by their school.

For students under 16, the curfew time is 9pm.

Hosts may choose to set a curfew at an earlier time if this is more convenient for them.

5. In your home

5.1 Your student's living space

It is important to designate space for your student to use for organising, storing and displaying personal belongings, and a place for studying such as a table or desk. Your student will need a certain amount of privacy and a place of his/her own.

5.2 A tour of the house

Depending on the time of your student's arrival, they may want to rest, especially if it is late. We suggest that you initially give a quick tour of their bedroom and bathroom facilities at this time.

An official tour of the home can be done one or two days later. This may include how to use electrical appliances and equipment, and where to find things they may use. By doing this, you are showing your student how to be an active member of the family.

5.3 Food

Food and the practices that surround it unite members of a culture. To integrate your student into your daily routine, take some time to explain your eating schedule and customs. You may invite him/her to go grocery shopping with you, and possibly allow him/her to select a few of his/her favourite foods. The student must, of course, adapt to your diet and meal times rather than his/her own.

5.4 Communication

The best advice we can offer is to start as you intend to go on. This means explaining basic things the student needs to know as soon as possible after his/her arrival, and establishing a pattern for open and clear communication. Inform your student about the house rules, your routines and schedule and how you expect him/her to fit in.

Don't 'roll out the red carpet' for your student in the first weeks, treating him/her as a privileged guest with no responsibilities. Waiting weeks to outline your expectations may result in confusion and misunderstanding later on during his/her stay.

5.5 Setting house rules

Here are some useful suggestions for areas to cover when setting your particular house rules:

- Telephone use for incoming and outgoing calls.
- Internet usage, if any.
- Times for using the bath/shower.
- Keeping the bathroom tidy and clear of toiletries.
- Where, if at all, smoking is permitted.
- Whether visitors are welcome and until what time.
- Guests of the opposite sex.
- Times for breakfast and, if applicable, evening meals.
- What to do when a student expects to be home late.
- Overnight guests.
- Noise levels at particular times of day/night.
- Whether food is allowed in the student's room.

Please remember that these are only suggestions, and not compulsory areas to cover. You need to consider what is best for your home.

5.6 Mail and luggage

A host may not hold or destroy mail addressed to a student. We advise you to keep a note of the student's forwarding address. Please either forward his/her mail or return it to the post office marked 'gone away'. A host may hold luggage or other property belonging to a student against a disputed debt providing authorisation is obtained by UKguests.

If property is left behind or abandoned by a student, it may be held by the host, or preferably by the school. After a reasonable period of time the student or his/her parents will be contacted and asked for instructions as to the disposal of the goods, or payment in advance for the cost of postage.

5.7 Telephone and Internet use

Use of the telephone and Internet is entirely up to you. Many hosts allow students to receive incoming calls only. If you are comfortable with your student making outgoing calls, then a good option is an international calling card. Calling cards are available at most local shops, and your student can buy one that has a certain credit limit (e.g. £5, £10).

However, international students will often travel to London with their own laptop and request homestays with Wi-Fi. Students need Internet access to be able to study and keep in contact with friends and family back home. International students are as active on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter as UK students. Many have a Skype account, which will allow them to make free international phone calls when connected to the Internet.

If Wi-Fi is available in your home, you will need to give the student, the access code and password so they can connect to the Internet.

Different Internet packages come with different monthly download limits. Hosts are advised to consult their Internet service provider regarding any download limit on their own account before allowing a student to use the Internet. If you wish to monitor Internet use at any time thereafter, your Internet service provider should also be able to advise you on how close you are to your download limit at any time in any given month.

Hosts are also strongly advised to include guidelines on Internet use in the house rules provided to any students.

5.8 Hot water, heating and lighting

Please remember that many students come from countries with very different climates to that of the UK and those from hot countries will feel the cold a lot more than British people. You should also consider that it is quite common for some families abroad to have the heating on all day and night.

Please be conscious of such potential differences, and where necessary use your house rules to avoid any misunderstandings.

As a basic requirement, please ensure that there is enough hot water for one daily shower and enough heating and lighting, especially in the student's room. Providing extra blankets will be a suitable alternative to having the heating on all night.

5.9 Culture shock and dealing with homesickness

Initially, your student will be very excited about the new culture. However, as time passes, the reality of cultural differences sets in. Such differences in lifestyle, values, beliefs and interpersonal relationships will at first be disorientating. At this stage, he/she may begin to miss friends, family and places, resulting in homesickness. This can manifest itself in a wide range of behaviour, including confusion, withdrawal, tiredness and anxiety. Providing a comfortable and welcoming home environment and offering a kind word of reassurance and encouragement will go a long way to overcoming such culture shock.

Being aware of what your student is going through and helping them to cope with the symptoms are the most effective actions you can take. Once this negative phase has past, most students will settle into their new life. These feelings are normal and common and the majority of students will navigate through them perfectly well.

Different cultures may express social etiquette in different ways. For example, while we expect our guests to say 'please' and 'thank you' as polite gestures, students from some cultures may not be used to this. It is not necessarily disrespectful, as they may not be aware of what we consider polite or rude. It is also useful to understand that body language and tone of voice can vary from culture to culture, so it is possible for hosts and students to misunderstand each other.

5.10 Religious practices and beliefs

For many students, their religion is not merely a code of conduct, but dictates their way of life. It should therefore be respected and received with an open mind. Religion can also provide security for students who are facing an unfamiliar environment.

6. Understanding different attitudes to hygiene and personal habits

Hygiene issues are a sensitive area, particularly in a cross-culture situation. Your student may have habits that differ from ours in the UK. For example:

- In some cultures, people bathe less frequently and change clothes less often.
- Some students may be shocked to find that household pets have access to most areas of the house, including the kitchen.
- Many cultures prefer a shower to a bath, as 'sitting in dirty water' is seen as unhygienic.

It is important that female students are told about how to dispose of sanitary towels, as often they are too shy to ask.

As a host, it is not unusual to encounter behaviour that you consider strange or unusual. If your student seems to have any abnormal personal hygiene habits, it is best to try to deal with it in an open and mutually respectful way.

7. Language skills

7.1 Level of English

It is important to remember that not all students will have the same level of English, due to factors such as education and amount of exposure to the language.

Your student's English will improve with time and practice. At first, communication may be difficult, but assessing his/her strengths and weaknesses will help to determine how best to work with his/her English skills.

7.2 Helping students to practise English

Daily conversation is a very important part of the student's learning process during his/her stay. You will find that most students love to talk about their home and families. Showing an interest in their progress at school and even helping out with their homework where possible will be very valuable for you too.

As a host, it is necessary that you help and encourage your student to communicate in English. When talking with your student, try to speak slowly, simply and clearly without exaggerating and seeming rude.

Watching television provides entertainment and improves students' English. The student may expect to be able to watch television with you. Be aware that certain programmes may be more or less interesting to the student than to members of your family.

8. Student checklist guideline

It can be easy to get lost in a new city, which is why we have compiled a simple checklist to help you help your student to stay safe. Before your student's first venture out alone, please go through the following with him or her:

- Ensure s/he has a house key and that it is put in a safe place.
- Write down your address and telephone number. Remind your student not to keep the address and house keys together!
- Write down the location and name of the nearest bus stop to your home and make sure they know the relevant bus numbers going to and from the school/city centre.
- Make sure s/he tells you where s/he is going and what time s/he expects to be coming home.

Whatever the age of the student it is essential that the host lives in the home for the duration of the placement. If in an emergency you expect to be away from your home for more than 24 hours while a student is with you, please inform UKguests immediately. Depending on the circumstances, UKguests may have to relocate the student.

9 Students' health and welfare

9.1 Medical treatment /GP services

Any student staying in the UK for longer than six months should register with a doctor on arrival.

If any medicine is prescribed, make certain that the student understands the dosage instructions and that the medicine is kept in a safe place. Students studying in Britain for less than six months who are not EU nationals (or from a country that has a mutual health agreement with the UK) have to pay for NHS treatment, unless it is emergency treatment or treatment for an infectious disease. The cost of this should normally be covered by the student's medical insurance.

If your student needs a dentist, it is usual to send him/her to the dentist used by your household. You should make the student aware that s/he will be expected to pay for the treatment.

9.2 General welfare

It is important to keep an eye on your student to make sure that his/her work and health are not suffering in any way, as you would with your own children. This will mean ensuring they have plenty of good food and not too many late nights!

Please note that students aged over 18 should be allowed to stay out late or even spend the night away from home. They should, however, always let you know if they are going to be late for meals or home very late.

If you have any urgent concerns about your student's welfare, you should contact UKguests on the emergency contact number provided at the time of booking.

This number should only be used for urgent matters that they cannot wait to be dealt with during office hours (Monday to Friday 9:30am to 5:30pm).

9.3 School attendance

Students are expected to attend school each day according to their timetable. They are responsible for getting themselves up and ready each day, although a gentle wakeup-call won't go amiss!

If your student is unwell or likely to be late for some reason, s/he is expected to telephone his/her school first thing in the morning. If s/he is too unwell to telephone him/herself, please contact UKguests or the school on their behalf.

9.4 Opening a bank account

If your student is staying with you short term, then we would advise that you do not allow your student to open up an account with your address. However, for longer-term students, you may wish to consider allowing them to do this. This is entirely up to you and you do not have to do so if you are not comfortable with it.

Please consider, however, that living in London without a UK bank account may be expensive and is not ideal for the student. In this case the student may ask to be relocated to a homestay where it is possible for him/her to open a UK bank account.

If you allow a student to open a bank account at your address, we advise that you ensure that the student closes the account before s/he leaves.

If you have any concerns regarding issues around student bank accounts, please contact UKguests directly.

9.5 Change of homestay details

If the description of your accommodation changes in any way whatsoever, please inform UKguests in writing immediately so that we can change your details on our database. Additionally, if you decide to make another room available to students, please inform us so that we can arrange a re-visit before any students are placed in the room.

Failure to notify UKguests may result in us placing a student with you who may have been matched using your original details, but may not match your new ones. Consequently, this could lead to UKguests relocating your student to a new host.

UKguests are required to carry out periodic re-inspection visits as part of our obligations to our clients. We will ask for your cooperation in such instances and will endeavour to provide as much notice as possible when this is required.

9.6 Safeguarding students under 18

While the majority of our students are over the age of 18, during the peak season we often receive a higher volume of students who are 18 or under.

There are very strict rules regarding accommodation arrangements with homestay hosts for students under 18. It is important that all hosts are aware of their duty of care when hosting underage students, and that they are familiar with UKguests' policy on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults (this can be found on our website).

There may be further responsibilities in the supervision of such students, such as morning and evening collections at a meeting point near the home. Any such requirements will be discussed with the hosts in advance, so they can decide whether or not to accept the booking.

All students under the age of 16 come under the jurisdiction of the Children Act 1989. In these cases, UKguests, the school and you as the host have a duty of care. This means that you and/or the school must know where the child is at all times.

If students under 16 are often going out on their own after school, you should contact UKguests straightaway.

Specific requirements are:

- No students aged under 16 must be given their own house key.
- All students under 16 must return to their homestay accommodation by 9.00pm.
- No students aged under 18 must be lodged with students aged 18 or over.
- No more than two students (of any age) must share a room, unless specifically arranged by UKguests.
- No students (of any age) with the same mother tongue must be placed in the same homestay, unless specifically arranged by UKguests.
- The main host in the homestay must have an enhanced DBS check and must sign the Children Act 1989, declaring any convictions or offences against children in relation to him/herself and on behalf of all other adults in the home.

Current or prospective homestay hosts should contact UKguests if they have any questions or doubts about any of the above matters before agreeing to accommodate any students under 18 years of age.

10. Laws that affect you as a host

10.1 Data Protection Act

UKguests holds information on each registered host on its database. This includes the host's name, address, telephone number, details of the host and other family members, a description of the accommodation and the history of placements made.

We will not disclose this information to any third parties other than to the potential student, school or international agent **after the host has agreed to accept a booking**. UKguests may also be required to give details of hosts who have accommodated students from UKguests to British Council inspectors, who also keep this information confidential.

UKguests have a legal obligation to provide information upon request to government organisations such as HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and UK Visas and Immigration.

10.2 Department for Work and Pensions

Under the Social Security Administration Act 1992, local DWP inspectors have the right to access any records of payments to hosts, as part of their investigation into social security fraud. UKguests does not routinely provide the DWP with such information. However, if we are ever asked by DWP inspectors to show them these records, we will be legally bound to do so.

10.3 Capital Gains Tax

If you sell your home, you will not be liable for Capital Gains Tax on rooms used, short or long term, by students, so long as meals are provided and the sitting room, and/or other communal rooms are shared with the students.

10.4 Rent Acts

As a host, you are not risking students having security of tenure (becoming 'sitting tenants') as long as food is supplied. This includes providing breakfast only, or half board (breakfast and dinner). If you do not provide meals (self-catering accommodation) or are letting a bedsit, studio or furnished flat, this may be classified as a 'holiday let' as long as the student does not stay more than 8 months. This also means that security of tenure should not apply.

10.5 Fire precautions, health & safety

Safety in the home is extremely important when hosting a student. Fire safety law applies to anyone who has a paying guest in his/her home. Therefore, we require all homestay hosts to comply with the current law. This includes the following:

- Regularly updating gas safety certificates and carrying out a fire risk assessment at least once a year.
- Checking electrical wiring before hosting students.
- Having and regularly testing smoke alarms.

For further information on completing a fire risk assessment, please contact UKguests.

For further information on your responsibilities for ensuring that your home is safe, please visit: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/index.htm>

10.6 Gas safety

Every year in the UK a number of incidents are reported involving gas appliances. These include carbon monoxide poisoning, fires and explosions. You are required to take the following precautions:

UKguests will request to see a current valid Gas Safety certificate for the property as per Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. This is to ensure that the property has been inspected and approved by a Gas Safe registered engineer.

All gas appliances must be checked annually by a Gas Safe registered engineer. The law also states:

- All boilers and central heating systems should be installed and serviced regularly by 'competent persons' only (i.e. Gas Safe registered engineers).
- No appliance should be used if it is known or suspected to be unsafe.

10.7 Race relations

As a host, you are entitled to refuse to host a particular race, nationality or religious group. You must not publicise such discrimination. At UKguests we reserve the right to match students to their preferred host. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion or nationality when taking people onto our books as potential hosts (as long as they have an acceptable level of spoken English).

11. Top tips for successful hosting

Let your student know your house rules straight away to avoid any future misunderstanding. It is more difficult to apply a new house rule if your student has been a part of the family for a long time.

- Treat your student as you would want to be treated abroad.
- Take time to get to know your student.
- Let your student know whether or not s/he is allowed to help him/herself to food.
- When your student arrives, let him/her know what time you usually have dinner. Make sure s/he understands that s/he must call you in advance if s/he is going to be late or will not be coming home for dinner.
- If your student has a mobile phone, make sure you have his/her phone number in case of emergencies.
- Many students find the British weather cold even during the summer months. Make sure you have a spare blanket available if the student needs it.
- Communicate! Your student may feel uncomfortable at first, but talking to your student to find out about his/her likes and dislikes will help him/her to feel more comfortable.

Most importantly – enjoy your hosting experience!

If you have any queries regarding this handbook for homestay hosts, please do not hesitate to contact UKguests.