



**ADVICE FOR  
HOST FAMILY STUDENTS**  
Making a success of your time  
in Ireland with future learning

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## INTRODUCTION

You are about to start an exciting adventure and make memories which will remain with you for the rest of your life! You are also coming to Ireland to learn the language and experience Irish culture. Imagine you are a cultural investigator; observe, listen, participate and always try your best to understand and ask questions. It's natural to feel a little nervous in advance of this exciting journey.

Forming good connections and building a relationship with your host family, the school's staff and your fellow students will help you to settle in Ireland. In the many years that we have been looking after international students on our High School Programme we have noticed that there are particular scenarios and situations that come up and we hope that by explaining them to you in advance, you will know what to expect and be better prepared to deal with them successfully. We are talking here about what to expect from your accommodation in general but with specific tips for your host families too.

## RESPECT & PARTICIPATION

Take in all impressions and information you can, remember, this is a different culture and people in Ireland and students from other places do things differently to you. That does not mean it is better or worse than your way, it is just different. Always be respectful in your words and actions and tolerant of social, cultural and personal differences. Sometimes, comparing the Irish customs to your own can be misunderstood as saying "my way is better". and after all – to truly learn about Irish culture you also have to accept the differences. Participation is also important and while there may be times you would rather stay in your room, it is not good to isolate yourself. You are here to take part in all aspects of the programme and should give it your best efforts.

**Host Family Tip:** Offer to help your hosts with dishes, tidying up after meals or laying the table. It will be much appreciated by your host family and creates a good opportunity to talk to the family, get to know them better and improve your English.

## THE POWER OF POLITENESS

One of the MOST important values for Irish people is to be polite. If you can remember to ALWAYS say "thank you", and "please" then it will be much easier to resolve any misunderstandings. Whenever a member of the host family hands you something, makes something for you or does something kind for you, always say "thank you" and when you ask them for something to add "please" at the end, if you need to interrupt or get past then use "excuse me".



## MANNERS & ADAPTATION

### HUMOUR

A laugh, a smile - they are an international means of communication. This includes laughing at funny situations you might get into due to misunderstandings. Being able to laugh at your own shortcomings and mistakes is vital when you are an exchange student - because you will make some funny mistakes! A good laugh will give you the strength to correct a mistake and it is a lot more enjoyable than getting upset with yourself.

### ALWAYS ASK

If you are not sure what to do about anything, always ask for advice from your host family, they will understand. They will try to help you as much as possible. Even these everyday interactions are a great opportunity to use your English and if they are correcting you that is even better. They want to help you to learn as much as you can. There is so much to learn and there is no such thing as a stupid question, ask in any way that you are able. Our staff and host families will be happy to answer any question that you may have during your stay.

### ADAPTION

Some tips on how to adapt to a different culture.

Though many hidden factors can make it difficult to get insight into another culture, it is not impossible. The following tips may help you better understand and adapt to a new culture.

- ◇ Don't Assume you understand everything - remember that you are among new rules and customs that may be unfamiliar to you.
- ◇ Improve your command of the language and use it. Even though you cannot speak perfectly, the fact that you try to speak will be appreciated. Making an effort shows people that you really try to adapt.
- ◇ Don't judge situations too early. Avoid value judgements: The natural tendency to right away label everything you see as "good" or "bad" may be a serious obstacle to understanding a new culture. Observe, describe and most importantly accept other people on their own terms.
- ◇ Show empathy. To show empathy is to place yourself emotionally in someone else's position and see the situation from their point of view. Remember that there are different ways of seeing the same situation.
- ◇ Learn to express yourself appropriately. Communication happens on many levels, it is necessary to be aware that every culture has its own pattern for expressing thoughts and feelings. Try to adapt to this pattern – both verbally and non-verbally.
- ◇ Check meanings: If you are in doubt double-check that you have understood correctly. Both words and body language can have different meanings in different cultures.
- ◇ Accept that it is natural to be insecure.
- ◇ Share with others as much as you can. Show your ability to participate, to try out new things and to learn about your hosting community and their culture.

# FOOD & MANNERS

## FOOD

While Ireland still does not have a food culture comparable to those of Italy, Spain or France, home cooks are starting to give greater value to their culinary heritage. In Ireland, traditional dishes such as roast leg of lamb or roast beef still form the centrepiece of weekend family dinners. Cooks still combine simple ingredients such as mashed carrots and parsnips and rich, golden butter to produce wholesome, delicious dishes free of elaborate sauces or exotic spices.

In Ireland, the culture of food may be different to what you are used to. Remember, you are here to experience the local culture and while you may not be familiar with the food you are served, it is polite to try it. Another important cultural difference is differences in meal times and if you don't adjust to eating at Irish meal times you will be hungry later, start with breakfast and eat some of what is offered. If there is anything that you are not able to eat make sure to tell your host family. Typical meals in Ireland are

Breakfast of fruit, cereal, toast and tea at 7-8am, Lunch of sandwiches and drink 1-2pm, Dinner of meat, vegetable and potatoes at 6-7pm. In the case of a host family they may not be comfortable with you using the kitchen, so make sure to ask first.

**Host Family Tip:** Offer to help the host family with the weekly food shop. This might even give you an opportunity to suggest some of the food you like to eat, but you can't expect them to change what they eat or to buy more expensive things than usual. Maybe you could offer to cook for your host family one night and introduce them to your favourite meal. Once you settle in, you could suggest you make your own packed lunch once or twice.

## DO'S AND DON'TS WITH FOOD



### Don't

- ◇ Say "I don't like this" or "this doesn't look good". This will be considered rude and an offence to those who prepare the food. If you really don't like the food – and you get the food every day/week – it's ok to say in a nice way that it is not your favourite. Also, don't say you really like something if you don't.
- ◇ Take more on your plate than you can eat. It is not acceptable to throw away food. It is much better not to take enough the first time and then ask for seconds.
- ◇ Leave the table or the dining area before everybody is finished!



### Do

- ◇ Try everything! If you don't try, you will not know if you like it!
- ◇ Eat the same food as everyone else! It is considered inappropriate for individuals to request special foods for themselves (aside from dietary requirements)
- ◇ Eat without worrying too much. Food is a big part of a country's culture and you have to try it all! And last but not least (actually, it's the most important):
- ◇ Say "Thank you" - it should always be said when you are done eating and are leaving the table.



## HOUSEKEEPING

### CLEANLINESS

The cleaning routine is important for everyone but it can be very different from the habits in your house. Every family has a different schedule and ways to clean and tidy their place, be mindful of the different house rules and adapt to them. A strong smell of cleaning products is taken as an essential sign of a clean house by some people and considered unhealthy by others. In older country houses having old furniture is part of the vintage charm and encountering a spider is considered good luck. A busy family with young children might wait until the evening to tidy up. That something is different or new to you doesn't have to mean bad. It is part of the experience of a different culture. Keeping your space clean is part of your responsibility too, even if someone else does it for you back home. Tidy up your own bedroom regularly and play a part in looking after the common areas.

**Host Family Tip:** Keep things in perspective. What is most important is that people are kind, the place is warm, you are given enough food and are being well looked after. If there is anything which makes you feel uncomfortable, explain it to the host family and you can work on a solution together.

### LAUNDRY

When you need fresh clothes, ask the host family if it is ok to use their washing machine and ask for instructions on how to use the machine. You will not be able to do laundry every day and should plan what you wear around a weekly schedule.

**Host Family Tip:** Your host mother might do your laundry, but you may be expected to do your own laundry as part of being a member of the family. Always ask which they would prefer. The most important thing is to keep your dirty clothes in one area until you have enough to wash (i.e. in a laundry basket) and to keep your clean clothes neat and tidy.

## THE BATHROOM

Whether you have an individual bathroom or you are sharing one, it is your responsibility to clean up after you use it. Remember to clean the tub or the shower basin after you have finished and to dry the floor if it gets wet. When you are sharing a bathroom try to respect your turn and not to spend too much time in the bathroom during "rush hours." Find out what works best for you and the others.

**Host Family Tip:** Most homes will have one or two bathrooms complete with a shower or a bathtub or both. Often the hot water heater (called the immersion) will be regulated by a timer or turned on only for the time it is needed. Therefore, you should ask your family when is the best time to take a shower or bath and how the heater works.

### POWER, HEATING & INTERNET

Ireland uses the same plugs and sockets as in the UK so you will need to bring adaptors to be able to plug in your own devices. Your room may have storage heating which heats up overnight and lets out the heat during the day. Don't cover heaters or adjust timers if it is too hot or doesn't heat up immediately. Ask your host family for help if you are too warm or too cold.

You will have access to the internet in your accommodation but ask if you are having any difficulties with it. In the case of a domestic connection, bear in mind that it might slow down when all the members of the family are using it in the evenings and also consider others before streaming films or games that require a lot of bandwidth.

### ROOMING & LIGHTS OUT

If you are up all night you will not be able to take an effective part in lessons and activities. Host families take it as an important part of their responsibilities to ensure that you are home safely at a set time. It is critical that you keep in contact with your host family and that they are able to contact you at all times. If you are missing and have not communicated with them, then they will contact Future Learning to try and find out what has happened.



## SMOKING & DRINKING

One of the big differences about Ireland is that it is considered bad for young people to smoke and drink. This is not just a question of manners, but it is also a matter of law and is something that you will have to adapt to during your stay. Smoking is prohibited by law in all workplace areas including, offices, bars, shops, buses and especially schools. In Ireland it is illegal to sell tobacco to anyone under the age of 18 even if they come from another country. Any shop that sells it will be in trouble with the law. "Vaping"/"E-cigarette" are considered equivalent to cigarette smoke and are subject to the same rules. Any smoking in bedrooms will trigger fire sensors.

The same applies to alcohol. It is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be served alcohol in a shop or a pub. Please do not put yourself or anyone else in this position. If you are under 18, drinking alcohol is not allowed while you are in Ireland with Future Learning. There should be no need to say that illegal drugs should absolutely not be in the possession of anyone on our programmes and it would be a serious police matter and may also lead to you being sent home at your own expense.



## RULES

### PIERCINGS & TATTOOS

These are considered unnecessary minor surgeries which can needlessly put the participant's health at risk, which is why they are not to be undertaken during your stay with Future Learning in Ireland.

### RULES & LAW

The rules we ask you to follow are not meant to limit your freedom but to ensure that your stay is safe and that your experience is of the highest quality. Future Learning Ireland participants must obey the laws of Ireland. Future Learning cannot protect you if you disobey any laws during your stay.

### TRAVELLING ALONE

You should not leave the school or accommodation without permission and under no circumstances should you travel alone. This is not a tourism programme. You are in Ireland for such a short time to learn the language, attend your school, it is best to make the most of it. You can travel at weekends provided you are with your host family or there is a trip organised by your school. You should never hitchhike due to the risks to your safety and wellbeing that it involves.

Even if you have a valid driver's license at home, you are not allowed to drive any kind of motor vehicle bearing a license number (cars, motorcycles, mopeds etc.) because of local insurance regulations.

Electric scooters are not currently legal in Ireland for use on public streets.

## SAFETY TIPS

Uncomfortable social situations can occur in any society. Such situations are most common among teenagers, an age group which is generally eager to try new and unknown experiences. It can be difficult to handle a new situation within your home society but in a culture that is new to you, such a situation can seem even more confusing. By presenting you with some legal and cultural rules in Ireland we hope to help you make informed decisions.

In any situation you may encounter during your stay in Ireland, it is important to keep in mind that you should not compromise your personal moral values or do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable while you are here on the exchange programme. While it is important for an exchange student to be open-minded, adventurous and accepting of the host culture, this does not mean you should ignore everything you have learned in your home culture. It is always a good idea to observe the behaviour of those around you, then follow what your inner voice tells you about what you have learned concerning what is right and what is wrong.

The best general advice regarding issues of personal safety is as follows:

- ◇ Get to know the host culture through questions, dialogue and discussion with your host family, peers and the local contacts.
- ◇ Take seriously any concerns expressed by your host family, FL staff and school and follow their advice.
- ◇ Do not ignore your own instinct in any given situation or feel you have to compromise your own personal behavioural values and beliefs. These are valuable resources in making decisions about what to do.

## KNOW THE RULES TO KEEP YOU SAFE

When you think about this advice you will realise that it does not only apply to your time in Ireland but that it is important everywhere.

### RULE 1: DON'T GO OUT ALONE

**THINK ABOUT IT** before you go. Remember that if you can avoid situations that put you at risk in the first place, you're already one step ahead. There is safety in numbers and this rule is not just for young children, it applies to everyone. We are always safer if we take, for example, a fellow student.

### RULE 2: ALWAYS TELL AN ADULT WHERE YOU'RE GOING

Again, **THINK ABOUT IT. NEVER, EVER** go somewhere with someone you don't know. This includes hitching rides. Letting someone know where you'll be at all times is smart. If you're ever faced with a risky situation or get into trouble, your centre manager or a fellow student will know where to begin looking for you.

### RULE 3: IT'S YOUR BODY

During your exchange experience, you could face a situation that could put you in an uncomfortable position. You will constantly have to make decisions for yourself and may be faced with peer pressure about many things from who your friends are - male or female- to exposure to drugs and sex. One more time: **THINK ABOUT IT.** You have the right to reject unwanted and inappropriate attention such as teasing, touching, and bullying., **THINK ABOUT IT. NEVER, EVER** go somewhere with someone you don't know. This includes hitching rides. Letting someone know where you'll be at all times is smart. If you're ever faced with a risky situation or get into trouble, your centre manager or a fellow student will know where to begin looking for you.

### RULE 4: SAY NO IF YOU FEEL THREATENED, AND TELL A TRUSTED ADULT

Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself. Listen to your intuition and follow your best judgment. If your friends are making bad decisions, you don't have to. Have the confidence to say **NO** if anyone makes you feel uncomfortable about anything. And remember, it's never too late for you to tell an adult if anything is bothering you. If someone - anyone- touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to say no. Whether it is peer pressure about sex, drugs, or doing something that you know is wrong, be strong and stand your ground. Don't be afraid to make your feelings known.





## YOUR SAFETY

### SAFETY WHEN MOVING AROUND

In some countries or in communities where there may have been incidents of crime or violence, (burglaries, bag snatching, thefts, assault, pick pocketing), there may be public service organisations (schools, the police, community service) advising local residents about the problem and giving recommendations regarding personal safety.

Ireland is considered a rather safe country but like any other country, you should be cautious: there may be some places in local areas where you should avoid going, you should always dress in an appropriate manner, you should always be careful about your belongings (cameras, bags, books, etc.).

### SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Cultures differ in their views of appropriate sexual behaviour and practices between young people. Often clarification of attitudes may be necessary and, here again, the advice of people you have come to know and trust is very valuable. Knowledge about the people you socialise with is important and this is acquired best through increasing knowledge of the culture. Equally important are your own values and beliefs regarding your behaviour. In societies where some young people are sexually active there are also many who are not. You should not compromise your own personal values and beliefs regarding sexual behaviour. You may be unsure in some situations if you are being sexually harassed or if a particular person's behaviour would be considered as normal or just friendly. An important source is your own instinct. Your host family or teachers at school will be able to advise you about what is normal behaviour regarding people you do not know.

If a car pulls up on the curb alongside a female student, she should carry on walking and not get in. Do not go to isolated places with people that you don't know well.

During your exchange experience, you'll have many new and different experiences. Yet there are things that remain the same:

- ◇ Your body is always yours.
- ◇ You always have the right to say no.
- ◇ If something does not feel right to you, it probably is not!
- ◇ If a friend gives you cause for concern, get involved.

## EMERGENCIES

The role of the police -the Irish Police is called Garda - varies from country to country. In case you are stopped for any reason, you may not understand everything you are being told. In this case it is very important to reply with as much respect as possible and to cooperate, even if you are not sure of exactly what is going on. Always identify yourself as an exchange student. Should the situation become more complicated, contact your host family or Future Learning High School Coordinator. Always keep their numbers to hand.

To call the Police (Garda), the Ambulance Service or the Fire Brigade the number is **999** or **112**.

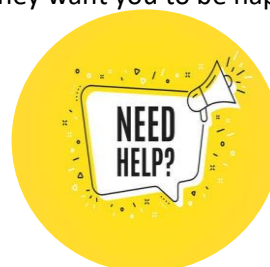
### ILLNESS, INJURY & WELL-BEING

If you feel unwell or injure yourself in any way, talk to your host family first. They will help you to seek assistance. In case of a serious illness or accident your host family will contact the Future Learning Coordinator and your parents. If you can't contact them for any reason, please call the Future Learning emergency number **0871037744**.

If you can't contact anyone in a real emergency you can call the emergency services on **999** or **112**.

If difficulties do arise, which you feel unable to handle with your host family or school mates or if you cannot approach your teachers about something personal that troubles you, it is important to talk to the Future Learning team. They will listen without judgment and suggest help where that is needed. It is an important part of your experience to learn to communicate your concerns and look for solutions on your own behalf whenever possible. Keeping worries to yourself will only prolong the concern.

If you get homesick talk about that too and then get up and do something! Homesickness comes from missing people or things that are familiar. Make yourself familiar with your new surroundings! If you feel unhappy, talk to your host family or Future Learning High School Coordinator. They are there for you and they want you to be happy.





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