

HOST-FAMILY HANDBOOK



Bridge Mills Galway Language Centre – IH Galway

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Office hours are:

Monday & Friday

09.00 - 18.00

Emergency:

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GENERAL CONDITIONS

Becoming a Host Family

Once you have contacted us to become a host family, we will send you the following:

- ◇ The host family accommodation application form. Please fill this in **carefully** (e.g. preferences) as it will greatly influence when we call you. Please also ensure you sign the back page (GDPR compliance).
- ◇ A host family accommodation payment form, which must be fully completed, signed and dated. This form is securely destroyed after your first host family payment.
- ◇ A Garda vetting invitation

All the above must be returned to the school at your earliest convenience.

- * Please note that on receipt of this disclosure, we securely destroy all copies of the IDs you provided us.

The most important requirement from our host families is that the student should be comfortable and well looked after during their stay in your home. Ideally, they will be treated like a member of your family in a welcoming, friendly, secure and clean home. Imagine it was your child or family member and consider how you would like them to be treated while travelling abroad.

Class information:

There are 3 types of students who require host families:

1. Morning students, who take classes:
09.00 - 12.15 Monday to Friday.

Some of these students also take afternoon classes:
13.30 - 16.15 Tuesday to Thursday.
2. Afternoon students, who take classes:
13.00 - 17.00 Monday to Thursday.
3. Groups, who typically take morning classes:
09.00 - 12.15 Monday to Friday.
Groups typically have afternoon activities and weekend tours.

Homestays:

Individual students usually book accommodation in multiples of 7 nights, beginning on a Saturday or Sunday. These homestays can range from 1 week to 6 months or more, although the minimum stay is typically 2 weeks. Every effort is made to ensure that the student remains in your home for the entire booking period.

Bookings:

Firstly, we will call you to see if you are available for the period required and inform you of any specific requests made by the student.

Then, we will send you a booking confirmation by email summarising all details.

Finally, we will call within a few days of the students' arrival to confirm the time of their arrival, providing the students have informed us. In some cases, they will contact you directly, rather than us.

Please let us know when you are not available to host students as soon as you can.

Cancellations:

In the event of a student cancelling or postponing their stay in Ireland, we will contact you as soon as we know. Every effort will be made on our part to replace the student. We cannot however, guarantee this.

We ask you to make every effort to inform the school of a change of availability from your side or a cancellation for a student as soon as you are aware of it. This avoids unnecessary disruptions to other host families and to the student's stay.

GARDA Vetting:

As required by the Department of Education, all our host families must be garda vetted before they host any students. For e-vetting, you will require a valid email address. Once we have sent you the host family pack (by post or email), the following steps are required in order for you to register with us:

- ◇ Fill out the garda vetting invitation for each individual older than 16 who currently lives in the house and return it to the school with 2 forms of photo ID per person.
- ◇ Within 10 working days of returning this paperwork, you will receive an email from the National Garda Vetting Bureau. Please ensure all applicants respond to this email within 30 days of receipt. Failure to do so, means the email will expire and the process must be started again.

- ◇ The Vetting Bureau will send us a vetting disclosure for each applicant.
- ◇ Once we've received this disclosure, we will proceed to book students with you, depending on the availability of students

Laundry:

The student should have weekly access to the washing machine, or the host family should wash one load of laundry (including jeans and jumpers/hoodies within reason) each week of the student's stay. This also applies to groups should they request it.

We recommend you give students a set day for laundry.

You are not required to iron student's clothes but please allow them access to an iron if they wish to use one.

Items such as winter coats, shoes or any items that require special care (e.g. leather jackets) are not the responsibility of host families to wash. Such laundry, in addition to any excess (more than one wash), can be taken to the nearest laundrette at their own expense.

A student may wish to do hand-washing. Please inform them clearly of your wishes in this regard, especially where to hang wet laundry.

Cleaning:

The student's bedroom must be cleaned at least once a week.

Please talk to the student about the cleaning schedules of the house and *we recommend you give them a set day to clean their room.*

Mealtimes:

Please be clear with the student regarding mealtimes. This includes weekday breakfast for afternoon students. Specifically, breakfast time is at your discretion and we do not ask you to provide midday breakfast. With regard to evening meals, should a student be late or not at home at the agreed dinner time - opting to eat later, please allow them to eat their meal at the later time (reheated if necessary). You are not required to sit with them at this later time.

Food:

One of the main sources of student dissatisfaction is the provision of repetitive, convenience, frozen or pre-cooked meals lacking vegetables and salad. Therefore, providing fresh, varied and well-

cooked food is a **mandatory** part of being a host family. Likewise, eating and chatting with the students every day over the evening meal is a **compulsory** element of hosting our students. Each host family is expected to chat with their students for a minimum of one hour each evening. This is their opportunity to practise their English and learn about Irish culture in a friendly environment and among the main reasons why students stay with, return to and recommend host families.

While there is no need to make ethnic dishes, we often have students whose ethnicity requires certain foods are not offered to them. In addition, some students have allergies or specific dietary requirements. We pay an additional fee per week for individuals with Coeliac Disease and an additional fee per week for a vegan diet. Otherwise, we do not charge students extra for their dietary requirements so we do not pay extra. Please refuse at time of booking if you do not wish to take a student with special food requirements.

Please also talk to the students regarding use of your kitchen. For example, some students wish to keep snack foods in your fridge and/or cupboards. In addition, an increasing number of students would like to cook and share food from their cultures with their new families.

Please make your feelings on this clear. Shared cooking and cleaning duties can be a great way to encourage communication between you and your new family member.

Meals:

Continental breakfasts are the ideal option, which can be self-service but a family member must be up and present.

Lunch must be provided at weekends if the students request it. Unless you are also eating, you are not required to sit with them at this time. If they are going on a tour, please offer a packed lunch.

The evening meal should consist of a light starter or soup, a main course and a dessert, which need only be fruit, cheese or similar. However, please consult your student about how much food they wish to have in the evenings. Some students are used to having large evening meals so this meal plan suits them well. However, other students have a large lunch and would prefer not to have another large meal in the evening but are often too polite to say. Please talk to them about their preferences.

Extending homestays:

Any request by a student to change the length of their stay should be discussed with the school before confirming the new arrangement with the student, especially if extra nights are being requested.

Student absenteeism:

If a student is absent from the house for one full week or more, for example, when long-term students wish to take a short holiday during their course, the school will charge the student in full to hold the room (with your advance agreement).

If you find the student is not attending class; and does not appear to have a good reason, please contact the school immediately.

Housekeys:

A house key **must** be provided to all students over 18.

In addition, the student may request a key to the bedroom, but in the interest of safety, the room should never be locked when the student is in the room. All students should be reminded of this.

We do not require or recommend you give house keys to students under 18. Doing so, is at your discretion.

The Bedroom:

The student's bedroom must have a comfortable bed with a good supply of bedclothes and a change of bed linen and towels **once a week**.

The bedroom must have adequate space for clothes storage, and **all family possessions must be removed**.

A table, chair and desk lamp are required in the bedroom for study purposes. Alternatively, the family can offer access to another room where the student can study undisturbed.

The bedroom must have adequate heating and lighting. The student's room must be comfortably warm whenever the student is present in the room. This may mean the late afternoon and evening, especially if the student wishes to study in the room after school. Foreign visitors to Ireland often complain about the lack of heat in our homes and can genuinely be uncomfortable. Please contact us if you have any problems with this.

Bathroom facilities:

Students must have free access to the bathroom at all times. Fresh towels should be provided weekly.

Access to a shower must be granted on a daily basis and a key must always be provided for students to shower in comfort. While we understand that they should not spend excessive amounts of time in the shower, please note that limiting shower time, for example to 10 minutes, is extreme and a common reason for students to request to change host family.

The host family can, of course, ask students to leave the bathroom in a clean and tidy condition after using it. Ultimately, bathroom cleaning is the responsibility of the host family

House rules:

As you know, some aspects of Irish culture differ greatly from the student's own, and host families need to be tolerant and occasionally flexible. Nonetheless, you are entitled to have your own house rules.

There are two approaches to this that host families have found successful. Some make their wishes clear as situations arise; others place a single typed list on the back of the student's bedroom door which they can translate into their own language and refer to as needed.

Issues that can be addressed here include students having friends over or helping themselves to food. Whatever approach you take, please convey your rules in a friendly manner.

Phone/WIFI:

As most students have their own phones, there is little need for them to use yours. Please set your own rules regarding use of the family phone and WIFI and make these rules clear to the student at the beginning of their stay. Please do not charge for WIFI.

Smoking:

The Public Health (Tobacco) Acts 2002-2015 forbids smoking in the workplace. Each time you are hosting a student, your home becomes a workplace. This means that smoking in any enclosed place in your home is illegal. As a host family, it is your responsibility to ensure that no-one smokes inside the house for the duration of a student's stay.

In addition, the majority of our students request a non-smoking family. Having smokers in your house will limit the number of students we can send you, even when the smoking is outside.

Animals:

If there are animals in the house, there may be issues with student placements as many students request hosts without animals, regardless of whether the animal is inside or outside the house. Please ensure to keep us updated on any additional animals in the household.

Extra Guests:

We ask students wishing to invite an overnight guest to the host family during their stay to make any arrangements and payments for this, not with the host family, but through the school office and if possible at the time of booking their course. This gives us the opportunity to discuss the matter with you before any arrangement is agreed, saving possible embarrassment to you if you wish to say no.

We do not encourage students to have guests, and you are under no obligation to agree.

Student feedback:

If we receive any feedback (positive or negative) we will endeavour to bring it to your attention— Please get in touch with us at any time if you have feedback to share with us about students or anything else of concern to you.

Departures:

There may be times when a student wishes or needs to leave the accommodation early if, for example, there is a serious illness or they have secured long-term accommodation (visa-requiring students only). With appropriate notice the student will be refunded the remainder of their accommodation fees. As host family, you will receive payment for this notice week and when possible, we will try to replace the student.

However, sometimes the conditions the student finds in the house are not the same as those indicated on the host family form submitted on registration. For example, students sometimes find that a host family does not eat or chat with them on a daily basis (which is mandatory). Under such circumstances, the student may request to move, meaning the host family will not be paid from the day of departure.

To avoid any misunderstandings, we ask host families to inform us as soon as possible of any changes in the conditions indicated on the form. It is important that we have accurate host-family details to give the student. We update our records regularly and the information provided by families is key to placing the right student with the right family.

At the same time, in the event that your student does not fit your household, please do not hesitate to contact us. It is your home and we want you to be a happy host family.

Arrival & Departure Times:

Students are asked to arrive at your house on their first day no later than 12 midnight, and they should try to depart at the end of their stay before lunch.

If you have any questions about this, please discuss it with the school.

Arrivals:

We do not ask families to pick up students on arrival or to take them to bus station on departure, although some families choose to do so.

This doesn't apply to group bookings, where this is required.

The school asks students to inform us in advance of his/her estimated time of arrival in Galway. We

always try to keep the family informed of any arrival information we have received. Students usually take a taxi to the host family on arrival.

It is essential, of course, that the host family is present to give a warm welcome to the student. The first meeting with the family often sets the tone for the student's entire stay.

Visa-requiring students:

Please note that visa-requiring students may require proof of address to register themselves at the immigration office and to open their bank account in Ireland. Not doing so is illegal and they will be deported.

- Please sign the proof of address form the school gives the student. (The Immigration Office needs to know where students are living at all times — once the student departs from your home, we will update the immigration office).
- Please note that all visa-requiring students are also legally required to inform the Immigration Office of any change of address.
- If you are still receiving post 3 weeks after the student's departure, please return to sender.

Host-family inspections:

We endeavour to conduct annual host family house inspections. Each host family must make their house available. The inspection process involves us contacting you to arrange a date and time for a Galway Language Centre employee to visit your home. The inspection takes approximately 15 minutes. The inspector will ask you some questions to ensure our files are up-to-date. Every room and living space the students have access to, will be inspected and photographed. These photographs are kept on file and no-one outside our accommodation team has access to them. Failure to comply with our inspection request or persistent last-minute rescheduling means we will no longer be able to work with you.

GROUPS

Group bookings involve a group of students coming from the same place, such as a school. They can range in age from adolescents to adults.

Arrivals/departures:

All groups require pick-up on arrival and drop-off on departure, typically at the Cathedral or New Coach Station. Should you be unable to pick up or drop off, we can organise a taxi for you which you must pay for. Please refuse, at time of booking, if this does not suit you.

Please note that a lack of public bus services on Sunday mornings, means group students may need a lift to the bus, if they are going on a tour.

Bookings:

Groups typically request two students share one room. However, there are a number of groups each year that request single standards in separate houses. Please refuse at time of booking if you do not want to take group students.

Lunches:

All groups require a packed lunch every day. At minimum, this must consist of:

- ◇ 1-2 sandwiches (depending on size).
- ◇ A packet of crisps.
- ◇ Fruit.
- ◇ A chocolate bar.
- ◇ A bottle of water.

PAYMENT OF HOST-FAMILY FEES

Payment for family accommodation is made on the 15th of each month (or the following Monday if the 15th falls on Saturday or Sunday) by bank transfer. Payment is calculated by the number of nights the student stays with you.

Any queries should be directed to the school office and not to students.

We also request that families not ask for payment before the 15th of each month. Please ensure we have your up-to-date email address and bank details including:

- ◇ Account Number
- ◇ BIC
- ◇ IBAN
- ◇ Sort Code
- ◇ Account Name

Your payslip will be sent to you by email, following payment.

PUBLIC AND SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

The school is closed during the following public holidays. No classes are held on these days. For detailed dates & times, please contact the school.

- ◇ Patrick's Day Holiday
- ◇ St. Bridgit's Day
- ◇ Good Friday - Easter Monday, inclusive
- ◇ May Bank Holiday
- ◇ June Bank Holiday
- ◇ August Bank Holiday
- ◇ Halloween Bank Holiday
- ◇ Christmas - New Year Holidays

If you are willing to host students over the weeks that the school is closed during Christmas, please let us know. Please note, the rates are higher for these weeks.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

AIMS:

- ◇ To promote the safety and well-being of children.
- ◇ To follow principles of best practice.
- ◇ To follow legislation.
- ◇ To have accurate policy and procedures.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF BEST PRACTICE IN CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE

- ◇ The welfare of children is paramount and child-centred.
- ◇ Children have the right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously.
- ◇ Parents/Carers have the right to be respected and consulted.
- ◇ Early intervention and family support should be available.
- ◇ Each child's gender, religion, culture and developmental stage should be considered when taking protective action.
- ◇ When working with adults, consider the impact of adult's behaviour on a child and act in the child's best interests.

Procedures for Reporting Issues

Who to speak to:

For informal consultation or to make standard report

Designated Liaison Person – Patrick Creed (info@galwaylanguage.com)

An Garda Síochána and Tusla (www.tusla.ie) should be contacted if a child is in immediate danger and the liaison cannot be reached.

The liaison's role is to:

- ◇ provide information and advice.
- ◇ receive and consider child-protection concerns.
- ◇ record in an honest and non-judgemental manner, exactly what is told by the student.

- ◇ make a formal referral – standard report.
- ◇ inform parents/carers/leaders.

Record keeping:

Record-keeping is of critical importance in this area of work. Unless accurate records are maintained, the ability to adequately protect vulnerable children may be severely hindered. It is essential that professionals keep contemporaneous records of all reported concerns in a safe place. These should include details of contacts, consultations and any actions taken. Any information told to you by a student, should be recorded in an accurate way, do not try to edit it or to 'put words in the student's mouth'.

GDPR -General Data Protection Regulation

Agreement for the sharing of personal data – GDPR compliance

According to new GDPR regulations (May 2018), we are legally obliged to require all our host families to agree to handle personal data, lawfully and securely.

You must:

- ◇ Always treat the personal data of our students completely confidentially.
- ◇ Only give access to students' personal data to those who need it.
- ◇ Delete personal data as soon as it is no longer needed by you (immediately after the student leaves your home).
- ◇ Comply with all current and effective laws in regard to personal data.

GDPR and you

The school also agrees to:

- ◇ Always treat your personal data completely confidentially.
- ◇ Only give access to your personal data to those who need it (e.g. students, payroll etc.).
- ◇ Delete your personal data as soon as it is no longer needed.
- ◇ Comply with all current and effective laws in regard to personal data.