

# Prestonwood Christian Academy



## International Student Program Handbook 2019-2020

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Prestonwood Christian Academy (PCA) welcomes you and your family to our school community. The mission of PCA is to equip students to embrace biblical truth, strive for academic excellence, and model Christ-like leadership to influence their homes, churches and communities for Christ. We look forward to your time with us and hope you will have many positive and enriching experiences that will create lifelong and happy memories of your time at PCA. To assist you as you prepare for your stay and to help you understand what will be expected of you once you are enrolled at PCA, we offer this International Student Program Handbook.

All International parents and students must read and understand all of Prestonwood Christian Academy Student/Parent Handbook. By signing the enrollment documents, families are agreeing to the standards and rules detailed in the PCA Handbook and PCA International Student Program (ISP) Handbook. If needed, you must have the document translated.

Parents who are investing in an international education for their children expect that they will behave well and act in a manner that reflects well on their family and country. It is important that you remember this expectation and honor your parents in doing your very best.

You must carefully read this Handbook and PCA's Student Handbook as they establish the required code of conduct, disciplinary rules, and obligations of a PCA student. You should know that some violations of the Handbook and/or PCA's Student Handbook may result in discipline, up to and including expulsion. PCA reserves the right to terminate a student's enrollment (and their participation in the ISP) if his/her conduct is considered detrimental or incompatible with the interests of PCA. In this case, all fees paid will be non-refundable and the student's I-20 will be revoked. To the extent that any one of these policies conflicts with any policy in the Student Handbook, you should comply with the PCA Student/Parent Handbook. If you or your parents have any questions about any ISP Handbook or PCA Student/Parent Handbook policy, you should speak to a PCA Administrator.

You should also read and follow the Appearance Code of PCA. You should seek guidance from your host parents for the appropriate attire. You will be required to purchase, at your own cost uniforms that are appropriate for school.

## **HOST FAMILY LIFE**

### **International Student Expectations**

- You can expect decent food and a clean room with comfortable furniture, a closet, a window that opens, internet access, and adequate lighting. You may share a bathroom with other members of the household.
- You can expect privacy. Others should not enter your room when the door is closed. They should knock first and await your permission before entering.
- You MAY NOT smoke, drink alcohol, or play your music or videos loud.

- If something seems uncomfortable – perhaps you are being asked to watch the children too frequently – you should speak with your host family or the Director or Coordinator of the International Student Program.
- You have the right to reasonable use of the laundry facilities. This is typically 2 or 3 loads per week, depending upon your host family guidelines.
- Your host family should prepare dinner at least 3 nights a week for you. They will also ask you what types of food you like and have these in the home after they grocery shop, usually once or twice a week.

### **International Student Responsibilities**

- You should be easy to get along with.
- Members of the host family are not your servants. **You are responsible to keep your own room clean. You are also responsible to clean the areas you use, particularly the kitchen, study area, and bathroom.** Do not leave clothes or other personal belongings around the house. Pick up after yourself.
- Your host family are not your chauffeurs. If you have places you need them to take you, you should communicate with them where you need to go, when you need to go and when you need picked up in advance. Be flexible and patient.
- Never take food or drinks into your bedroom unless you receive permission.
- You should be home in time for dinner or advise your host family **in advance** if you will not be there.
- Treat your host family's property with respect. You will be held responsible for damages.
- You should follow the family's schedule. For example, don't expect to watch television at 3 am or to do laundry or cook meals whenever you want.
- Ask permission **in advance** to bring a friend home or to go out with friends.
- Do not leave without getting permission **in advance** and informing your family where you are going.
- You should respect the family's privacy.
- You should not use the family's electronic devices without permission.
- You are expected to attend religious services with your host family. It is a requirement of your admission contract with PCA.
- Host family assignments are made for the entire school year. Every effort should be made to resolve any problems with your host family.
- You are expected to be on time for appointments and classes. Attendance at school is mandatory.

### **Expectations of International Students**

The following are expected of each student:

- **Be Independent.** Clean up after yourself, show initiative and ask your host family if you have any questions.
- **Be Direct.** Talk about any problems you may be experiencing that your host family can help you with. Do not worry about making mistakes using English.

- **Be Friendly.** Participate in family activities on a regular basis. Do not always go to your room and close the door or spend excessive amounts of time playing video games with your friends instead of interacting with your host family. Initiate conversations with your host family and be willing to share your experiences with them.
- **Show Respect.** Abide by common courtesies such as asking how late and how loudly you can listen to music or watch television, etc. Be sure to respect the family's need for quiet periods.
- **Be Polite.** Use good etiquette such as saying "please" when making a request and "thank you" after someone has helped you. In English, it is polite to use the phrase, "would like". For example, it is more polite to say, "I would like to take a shower," than, "I want to take a shower." It is always better to ask permission to do something than to assume you are allowed to do it.
- **Respect House Rules.** Always obey house rules. Your host family will go over these rules when you first move in. You should keep a copy of the rules and refer to them often. If you are unsure of any of the rules or if there is a problem, talk with your host parents.
- **Get Involved.** You need to make an effort to get involved in the PCA community and the local community. This can be done by attending and participating in school, church or community events. You should not spend all your time with other international students and should seek guidance from your host parents and school personnel when choosing friends.
- **Learn about Christianity.** You are expected to learn about the Christian faith, respect the Christian faith of those around you and adhere to the guidelines for Christian living as set forth in PCA's student handbook.

### **Conflicts and Resolutions**

If there is a problem with your host family, you must seek to resolve the problem first through direct discussion with your host family. If you and your host family are unable to resolve the problem, you and your host family may seek assistance from the International Student Program Director, and/or your parents. If you are experiencing any sort of relational stress, difficulty, abuse, or harassment of any kind, you must immediately report it to the International Student Program Director or Coordinator. However, even if you are experiencing hardship, you are not allowed to change host families or sleep over at your friend's house without prior approval from the International Student Program Director. Only the Director can reassign you to another host family.

### **Host Family Assignment**

In assigning you to a host family, PCA considers all relevant factors. You may not change your host family assignment unless it is an extreme situation. Any concerns of the student or family should be shared with the Director of International Students. Host family assignments are for one year at a time. You and your parents are welcome to share your preferences in advance for host family assignments for subsequent years, but such preferences are not guaranteed.

You are expected to become an integral part of your host family. You will be asked to assume duties and responsibilities in your host family's household. Such duties and responsibilities may include, but are not limited to, household chores, cooking, washing dishes, laundry, and cleaning. **You should help as much as you can.** For example, when the groceries are brought from the supermarket, assist in taking them inside the house and putting them away. **It is also nice to volunteer for something that needs to be done.**

**You must follow the host family's rules and customs regarding curfews, household chores, and internet use.**

**Your host family will expect you to act like an adult**, so be responsible and respectful. Be considerate to your host family. If you are going to be late for dinner, notify them in advance – at least an hour beforehand and preferably even earlier. If you are going out, ask permission in advance (at least 48 hours) and let them know where you are and when you are likely to be home. If you are going to be late, call or text your host family to let them know. They will be worried. Although your host family will generally treat you like an adult, your host parents are responsible for you and will ask you to work on areas of your life that need improvement.

### **Social Media Policy**

In addition to PCA's Technology Acceptable Use Policy, you must follow other social media policies to protect the Host Family's privacy. You are not allowed to post photos or videos of any member of your host family without their host family's prior approval. Nor are you allowed to discuss any matters related to any member of your host family unless you obtain prior approval of your host family. Furthermore, you must promptly delete any comments, photos, or videos related to the host family if requested by the host family.

Similarly, your host family is expected to provide the same level of privacy to you with regard to social media. Your host family will ask you for permission before mentioning or posting photos of you.

### **Communication with Home**

Your host family is expected to send a short email or photo of you to your family weekly during the first month or two of the school year and then on a twice monthly basis for the remainder of the school year.

PCA will send an email to your family each semester informing them of how you are doing at school and copy your host family on that email.

You are expected to Skype/FaceTime or call your parents in your home country at least weekly. Initially, you may want to communicate with your parents more often; however, after several weeks, you should not need to communicate with them every day. Communication with your home family should be coordinated with your host family's schedule and must occur prior to curfew in a manner that does not interrupt your host family's plans.

## **Finances**

You should have sufficient financial support to ensure your well-being during the entire program. You should have a credit/ATM card (that is capable of withdrawing cash from an ATM in the US) in your name with at least a \$1,000 credit limit to cover expenses throughout the year.

Typically, your host family will pay for routine expenses such as food, snacks, basic toiletries, and local transportation. However, you are responsible for any other expenses such as your cell phone bill, shopping, student social events, expensive toiletries, special foods, physical exams/doctor appointments/vaccinations, eye exams, calculators, special snacks, personal entertainment such as movies, sporting events, travel, clothing, and other optional purchases.

School day lunches are included in your PCA fees. Any off-campus lunch purchases are your responsibility.

You are not permitted to loan or borrow money from your host family or other students. You should never allow someone else to use your credit card. If you are having trouble with money, it is best to talk with the Director of ISP about your situation.

## **Electronics**

Your Host Family may have house rules on where you may use devices in the home. Your host parents may limit computer, internet, and cell phone usage if they feel it is interfering with your academic progress or hindering your social connection with your host family.

**You are required to have a charged, working cell phone that can be reached by dialing a US domestic phone number.** You are responsible for adding minutes to your phone each month in order to assure continuous service. You are also responsible for keeping your phone charged and turned on whenever you are not at home so that your host family can reach you.

Host families are required to have wireless internet available in their home. The primary language settings of all your electronic devices must be in English. Your host family will ask you for the password to your electronic device(s) so internet filtering software may be installed.

You are strictly prohibited from intentionally viewing a website with pornography, extreme violence, profanity, and /or other inappropriate content. Depending on the severity of any misconduct, you may be subject to discipline up to and including expulsion from PCA.

## **Transportation**

While enrolled at PCA, you may not acquire a driver's license in the US without permission of the ISP Director. Under no circumstances are you allowed to operate a motor vehicle, even in your driveway or backyard.

You will rely on your host family for transportation. They will provide you with rides to and from school and will arrange or provide transportation to and from church and extracurricular

activities such as sports, band activities, retreats, and other school functions. Before you commit to any outings/activities, you MUST discuss and receive approval from your host parents as soon as you are aware of the activity and at least 24 hours in advance. This shows your host family respect and understanding. You should discuss ride needs with your host family to understand their flexibility in providing rides in the context of their overall family needs, including other students.

Under no circumstances are you allowed to hitchhike or solicit a ride from a stranger. Taxis, Uber or similar services may only be used in rare circumstances with host parent permission, and only if you are over 18 or sharing a ride with a Host Family approved individual who is 18 years or older. You are not allowed to accept a ride not approved by your host family in advance.

## **MANDATORY ACTIVITIES**

All ISP students are required to attend the following activities during the school year:

- Back to School Orientation Day in August
- Upper School/ Middle School Retreat in August
- ISP Outings and Activities held each month
- TOEFL testing in September and April each year

Failure to comply and attend the above activities could impact your ongoing enrollment.

## **SCHOOL/ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

You will attend school regularly, will be enrolled as a full-time student, and may be required to participate in study or tutoring times. You must make a concerted effort to make satisfactory academic progress (A or B grades) and MUST be involved in some extracurricular activities. If you are achieving a C average or lower, PCA personnel and your host family may require additional study hours, including tutoring, and limit your extracurricular and weekend activities until your grades are improved.

Your grades will be reviewed weekly. If you have an F in any class, you and your host family will be notified, and you will be required to hire a tutor chosen by PCA staff at your parent's expense, and you may not be allowed to participate in any social activities until your grades are checked the following week and you no longer have any grade below C.

Teachers WILL NOT negotiate grades with students. If you have a concern or problem with a grade, it is fair to discuss this with your teacher. However, this should not be done regularly.

You are not automatically eligible for an athletic program offered at PCA. If you are interested in joining an athletic program at PCA, you must check the eligibility requirements of the program. Eligibility is determined on an individual basis by the state's high school association governing body. NOTE: Currently, International Students cannot participate in competitive varsity athletics their first year at PCA.

### **Learning English/English Only**

You must make a concerted effort to improve your English proficiency. To help accomplish this, you are strongly encouraged to interact with your peers by speaking English, and you should refrain from spending too much time with other students speaking in your native language. You will be expected to abide by the "English Only" rule in your host family home. The only exception to this rule is when you are communicating with your family and/or friends in your home country. You may not speak your native language when others who do not speak your language are present. Improving your proficiency in English will help you perform better in school and facilitate your adjustment to life in the U.S.

### **TOEFL Practice Tests**

The International Student Program desires for each of our International Students to constantly be strengthening their English proficiency while at PCA. In order to do this and to monitor your progress in English proficiency, all International Students will take the Test of English as a Foreign Language or TOEFL practice test two times during the school year. These tests are mandatory for students grade 8-11 until a score of 100 is achieved, at which time the tests become optional. There are no costs for the test, proctor or scoring of the exam. These scores will not be sent to universities but will be used by PCA for student placement and English proficiency tracking. The tests will be given each year in September and April.

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

Your host family and PCA staff reserve the right to first meet any of your friends and approve or disapprove such friend's visit. Students must abstain from all sexual activity. Serious romantic involvement is strongly discouraged. You may not take any action that may change the nature of your life (for example, become engaged or married) during your time at PCA.

If you experience any unwelcomed sexual conduct by another person, whether physically or verbally, you must immediately report the incident to your host parent(s) or a PCA official. Likewise, you must notify your host parent(s) or PCA official if you experienced harassment of any kind that is offensive or threatening to you and based on your race, gender, national origin, religion and/or disability. If harassment is found to have occurred, PCA will take appropriate corrective action.

## RELIGIOUS SERVICES/CHURCH

PCA is a Christian school and Biblical beliefs are integrated in every course and school activity. You are required to attend church weekly with your host family. If Sunday school/Bible Fellowship Class is a regular part of the family practice on Sunday mornings, you should also attend Sunday school. Evening youth group meetings and events are encouraged but are not required.

## SLEEPOVERS AND RETREATS

International students often get invitations to church retreats or to sleepovers with an American friend's family. At least 24 hours ahead of the proposed retreat, the ISP Director must have written permission via email from your parents and your host parents for any family or church retreat that is not hosted by PCA or Prestonwood Baptist Church. In addition, you and your host family must also communicate these plans and forward the permission email to the Director or Coordinator of the International Student Program.

International Students must also obtain prior approval from their parents, in writing, for Minimester trips. Parents should also include in this email a statement regarding parents accepting financial responsibility for all costs of the trip. You must forward the permission email to the Director or Coordinator of the International Student Program within 48 hours of Minimester trip registration.

You may not travel on overnight trips to other schools or to visit friends outside of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex without the permission of the Director or Coordinator of the International Student Program. These arrangements must be always approved **AT LEAST** one week ahead of the intended travel.

## FAMILY VISITS

We encourage your family to visit while you are attending PCA. You must notify the Director or Coordinator of the International Student Program **AT LEAST 2 weeks** in advance of a visit. The Director or Coordinator may suggest alternative dates if they feel the visit is at an inconvenient time for the student. You must also make hotel accommodations and transportation for their visit. Your family is not permitted to stay in your host family home. You may stay with your family at the arranged hotel.

## **HEALTH**

### **Medical/Insurance**

All international students must have appropriate medical insurance at your parents' expense. Any costs incurred due to pre-existing conditions or required immunizations will be the responsibility of your parents. Your parents are responsible for any medical expenses. You must carry your insurance identification card with you at all times.

You must notify your host family and the school nurse regarding any medication you bring from your home country.

If you are new to PCA, you will be required to:

- Provide documentation of up-to-date vaccinations as required by the state of Texas.
- Obtain or show documentation of a recent (within the previous 6 months) eye examination.

The cost of fulfilling these requirements are your responsibility.

### **Required Immunizations**

All students, whether international or domestic are required to maintain and up-to-date Immunizations record with PCA. Each year, PCA's school nurse reviews all students' immunization records and will notify you and your parents regarding delinquent immunizations. Since it is much easier and more cost effective to complete these requirements in your home country, we require all students to update their immunizations, if requested, over the summer break. If you do not update the record prior to returning to PCA in the fall, you will be required to obtain the delinquent immunizations within the first month of school at your parent's expense.

### **Counseling and Wellness**

At times, PCA may require you to be evaluated for emotional wellness from a PCA approved mental health provider. If counseling is recommended as a result of the wellness exam or if you request counseling, both you and your parents may be asked to sign a release form for counseling services. If counseling is recommended and your parents refuse to give consent and release and/or if you refuse to willingly and actively participate, PCA may terminate your enrollment immediately. As trust is crucial in the counseling relationship, PCA will make every effort to protect your privacy.

### **Accident or Illness**

- Your host family will provide initial care for you and seek medical attention if needed.
- You must bring your insurance card with you and the signed medical authorization and treatment form and present them to the hospital or physician to obtain treatment. Your host family will assure that this is done.

- Contact the Director or Coordinator of the International Student Program or the school nurse as soon as possible.
- Follow the doctor's advice for emergency treatment.
- PCA will contact and relay advice from your parents.

### **First Aid**

The School Nurse is available during school hours to help advise you and your host family regarding medical care if you become ill or are injured. If it is a life-threatening or urgent situation, your host family will take you to the ER or Urgent Care.

### **Smoking, Alcohol and Drug Use**

You must comply with all laws of the U.S. including state laws and municipal ordinances as a condition of your student visa. Under no circumstances may you use, purchase, or possess any tobacco products, drugs or alcohol.

You may not use, possess, purchase or own any type of fireworks or weapons, including, but not limited to, a knife, brass knuckles, slingshots, bow and arrows, throwing stars, switchblades, explosives or a firearm. A firearm includes any device that can shoot a bullet, pellet, flare, tranquilizer, spear dart or other projectile, whether loaded or unloaded. This also includes air guns, dart guns, pellet guns, BB guns, pistols, revolvers, rifles or plastic firearms made with 3-D printers and copying technology, as well as any ammunition for any such devices. You may use a regular cooking knife to help prepare meals with prior approval of your host parents or a PCA employee.

## **SCHOOL BREAKS**

All airline arrangements must not be made without prior approval from the Director of the International Student Program

Your parents are responsible for booking and purchasing all flight tickets to, from and within the U.S. for you. Once flight tickets to the U.S. have been purchased, you or your parents must forward a copy of the itinerary to the Director or Coordinator of the International Student Program immediately. Your parents must notify the Director or Coordinator of the International Student Program as soon as they become aware of any changes that need to be made to your flight schedule. Any changes of arrival or departure dates must be approved by the Director of the International Student Program in advance unless such changes are due to circumstances beyond control of you or your parents. If you arrive or depart earlier or later than the specified dates without prior approval of the Director of the International Student Program, you will be charged a fee of \$100 per day.

You are permitted to travel with your host family or PCA personnel within the US with prior approval of the Director of the International Student Program. Aside from trips directly to and

from your home country, you may not travel internationally or domestically alone unless prior approval is granted from the Director of the International Student Program. Prior approval will require you have an adult age 25 or older responsible for you during your travel. If independent travel is permitted, the cost of this independent travel would be your responsibility.

### **Beginning of the School Year**

You may not arrive more than 5 days prior to the first day of school (Back-to-School day – the exact date varies by calendar year) without prior permission from the Director of the International Student Program. Attendance is mandatory on the first day of school/Back-to-School day for all International Students. Failure to comply with this requirement could impact the student academically and/or ongoing enrollment as well as a \$100 fine per day absent. This day is also International Student Orientation Day for new and returning International Students.

All Upper School International Students are also required to attend the Upper School retreat that occurs that week. Failure to comply with this requirement could impact the student academically and/or ongoing enrollment.

### **Christmas Break**

As an International Student, you are required to spend Christmas break with your immediate family (parents, siblings) either in your home country or in the United States because of the high value we put on the relationship between you and your home family. Even a 10-day to 2-week break is very helpful to your cultural, emotional and psychological adjustment. You may not travel with friends or spend the Christmas break with your Host Family. Travel arrangements for all school break plans are the financial responsibility of you and your family and a copy of your itinerary must be submitted to the ISP Director no later than a month before the last day of school.

International Students must work with the ISP regarding flight departures to ensure final exams are taken appropriately. All International Students are required to return to the U.S. in time to be present for the first day of classes for the spring semester. Failure to comply with this requirement could impact the student academically and/or ongoing enrollment as well as a \$100 fine per day absent.

### **Summer Break**

You are required to go home every summer to reconnect with your family. International Students must work in conjunction with the ISP administration regarding flight departures to ensure final exams are taken appropriately. You are expected to depart no more than 5 days past the official last day of school, unless prior arrangements with your Host Family has been made at least 2 weeks in advance.

You should not book or purchase flight tickets between your home country and the U.S. for the following school year until re-enrollment contracts have been executed. In May of a given

school year, the I-20 may be extended for another academic year provided you have done well academically and are current on payment.

## **OTHER**

### **Visa**

You must comply with all restrictions imposed on your student visa. Under the terms and conditions of your student visa, you may not be employed while enrolled at PCA except for certain on-campus work. If you are found to have engaged in unauthorized employment, you may be subject to return to your home country for violating the terms and conditions of your visa.

### **Termination**

Although PCA hopes your enrollment will be mutually rewarding, PCA has the right to dismiss you or require your withdrawal when, in the exercise of PCA's professional judgement, it deems it appropriate to do so as a result of conduct on your part which is contrary to the school's policies/instructions or to these policies in the International Student Handbook and the PCA Student/Parent Handbook; conduct which is unsafe to self or others, academic performance which is inconsistent with the standards expected at PCA; or other acts or behavior PCA deems unacceptable. In this case, all fees paid will be nonrefundable and your I-20 will be revoked.

### **Miscellaneous**

If you need additional help for a matter not related to the academic requirements of PCA, your family must request permission for the activity and provide necessary funds and compensation for the activity (specialized athletic participation, orthodontic work, etc.).

You are prohibited from engaging in conduct that may change your legal status or significantly alter your physical appearance while enrolled at PCA. Such conduct includes, but is not limited to, getting married, becoming pregnant, causing a pregnancy, cosmetic surgery, tattoos, piercings other than in the ear (boys may not have piercings of any kind), or dying your hair an unnatural color (such as green, purple, pink, etc.).

Your parents have given PCA and partner organizations the right to use your photograph for reproduction in any medium for the purposes of publication, advertising, display or editorial use. No personal information will be publicized.

## **ADDITIONAL TIPS AND GUIDELINES**

### **Arrival in the U.S.**

As you come to the United States, keep in mind these points:

1. Many things will be different during your stay in US.

2. Relax and enjoy the differences.
3. Be open about your feelings. They are probably not unusual or shameful, so you have no reason to hide them! Share your feelings with your friends, your host family, and the ISP Director or Coordinator.
4. Seek new experiences. You will make the most of your time by embracing your time by embracing your new culture and host family. Be willing to try new things (especially food) and go new places.
5. Keep a strong sense of your own values and cultures.

Upon arrival you will probably be tired from jet lag. You may be homesick. At the same time, you will be excited and eager to begin your new life. Your host family and PCA may have a lot planned for you. Care for yourself during this time. Remember you will be nervous and tired. In particular, take naps when you feel tired and expect some difficulty sleeping at times. You should call home to let your family know you have arrived safely.

### **American Customs**

Americans have a number of customs that may seem different to you:

- Americans leave home for work and school early in the morning. They tend to have dinner earlier than other countries, generally around 6pm, and go to bed around 10 or 11pm. Dinner is not eaten whenever you get home; it's at the scheduled time. Often on the weekends everything happens a bit later.
- Americans go to their own bedrooms when they are tired, when they have work to do, or when they want to be alone. Don't feel that you have to remain with the family in the general living area until your host parents go to their bedroom. Feel free to go to your own room when you want.
- Don't routinely close the door to your room. Doors tend to be left open unless a person needs privacy. A closed door, therefore, signals that you don't want to be interrupted. When a door is closed and you want to talk to someone inside that room, politely knock on the door and wait for them to let you in.
- It is customary to leave the bathroom door open when nobody is inside. When using the bathroom, close and lock the door. When you are finished using the bathroom, make sure the toilet seat is down.
- It is not considered impolite to show your teeth while laughing. Most people will laugh out loud and show their teeth if something is very funny.
- Pierced ears are common for women but are against PCA's dress code for men. Women don't necessarily put on make-up every day. It's their choice or may depend on what they are doing that day.
- It is common to use tissues or a handkerchief rather than sniffing in public.
- Striking someone you have an argument with is not acceptable and is illegal. Students who hit other students may be expelled from school.
- It is illegal to urinate in public.

## **Politeness**

- It is important to show the same respect to your host parents that you would show to your own parents.
- It's considered polite to say, "Good morning" when you see people in the morning. In the evening, tell your host family, "Good night." When you are going to your room, don't just get up and leave. In addition, it is polite to say "hello" to whoever is home when you enter the house.
- Americans shake hands when meeting an adult for the first time. They do not bow.
- If people already know each other, they will generally just say, "hi" the next time they meet. If they are particularly close and have not seen one another in a while, men may shake hands with each other. Women, and some men, may hug. For a man and a woman, it depends on how close they are and their personality. Sometimes they will shake hands, and sometimes they will hug.
- When addressing an adult, always use the appropriate title (Mr., Miss, Mrs.) unless they have specifically asked you to call them by their first name. ALWAYS address teachers with by their title and last name.
- Leaving other people in routine situations is simple. A person will say, "bye" or "see you later". Sometimes people say, "talk to you later". They do not necessarily mean that literally, and you should not feel insulted or hurt when they don't call you in the next few hours or days.
- If you bump into someone by accident, say, "sorry" or "excuse me" to be polite.
- Hold swinging and heavy doors for other people who are following you in and out of them.
- If you see someone struggling to carry something, offer to help them carry it if you can.
- If you are preparing tea, coffee, or a snack for yourself, offer to prepare some for others
- When you are a guest somewhere, it is common to be asked what you would like to drink. Sometimes the host will tell you what is available. If not, kindly ask, "Do you have \_\_\_\_\_?"
- Clerks, waiters, taxi drivers, administrative assistants, and maintenance people should be treated courteously.

## **Communication**

Americans are normally quite direct. They use very little flattery, and they prize honesty. They get to the point quickly.

- Generally, people stand 2 or 3 feet apart from each other when talking. They may use many physical gestures.
- Americans maintain eye contact when speaking, but the contact should not be too intense. The pattern is to establish eye contact and then periodically look aside before returning to eye contact.
- In public places, you may have to adjust your voice level, speaking either quieter or louder. Take your cue from the tones of other people.
- You will find Americans uncomfortable with silence. They will generally rush to fill the gap in a conversation by saying something or asking a question.
- In American, smiling and giggling usually conveys happiness or amusement – not confusion or embarrassment. Since you are learning a new language and may not understand some

things, giggling may convey the wrong signal. The best approach is to say that you're having trouble understanding.

- Americans often show they are puzzled by frowning or tightening their forehead and eyes. If you smile or giggle in these situations, the message will be missed.
- People often talk to one another without being formally introduced.
- In some cultures, people show appreciation for food by making a lot of noises. In America, however, making loud noises while eating is considered rude. Americans try to eat without smacking or slurping noises. If something tastes good, tell the cook or chef that you liked it.

### **Host Family Life**

It is important that you not expect everything to be wonderful when you first meet your host family. This can be an awkward period with everyone feeling a little anxious. Allow adjustment time. **If you are feeling homesick, try to concentrate on what you like or can be thankful for about this new situation.** Personalize your room immediately, putting out your own photos and memories.

Treat children in your host family respectfully and kindly. You may find it valuable to read to younger children as a way of practicing your English. At the same time, do not be afraid to tell the children to leave your room. Close the door saying, "I have to study" or "I need to some rest." If a child is bothering you, it is reasonable to mention that politely to your host parents. Older children in the family will have their own lives to lead. They may not invite you into their circle. If this is the case, you should respect their privacy.

Take note of any special events in the host family, such as birthdays or holidays, and celebrate with them! Your host family will enjoy hearing about your own family back home. They will be delighted if you cook a meal for them occasionally to introduce them to your own culture.

Soon you will come to feel like part of your host family. It will take time. It helps, however, if you make a decision to integrate fully into the family's routines, rather than keeping to yourself in your own room.

Your host family will develop their own family guidelines and will give a copy of these guidelines to you and the Director of International Students upon your arrival. Your family guidelines will explain how things work in your home. Examples of items that are covered in the host family guidelines include, but are not limited to:

- Dinner time, bedtime, quiet time, and study time
- How laundry is handled (how to use the washing machines or dryers)
- Curfew hours
- How to clean the kitchen or dining area after you cook or eat
- Dress code outside your bedroom
- How to run a dishwasher and other appliances
- What to do in an emergency in the home
- The family's table manners, including who sets the table and who clears the dishes

### **Emergencies**

Learn what to do in case of an emergency: fire, tornado, etc. Most families should have a place to meet if there is a natural disaster. This allows everyone to be accounted for. Familiarize yourself with smoke and carbon monoxide detectors/alarms in the house.

Keep important phone numbers with you. This includes the home, cell and work numbers of your host family, along with the address of their house. When you leave the house, always have your working, charged cell phone with you. Familiarize yourself with the transportation routes around your house so that you do not get lost. If a stranger approaches you, remember, you do not need to talk to them. If you feel you are in danger, leave immediately, head to a place where there are other people and call your host family.

### **Household Appliances**

You may be familiar with most of the machines in your new home, but a few may seem strange. If you are unsure, get instructions from your host family.

Clothes dryers are common in America for doing laundry. Washing machines should not be overloaded as they will not work properly. Dishwashers are also very common. Watch and learn how the host family uses and operates each of these appliances.

Power outlets and voltage may also be different. In most of North America, it is 110-115 volts, 60 cycles AC. You may need an adaptor to operate equipment that you've brought from your home country.

### **Conflicts and Resolutions**

In life, we can always expect conflicts because we are not all the same. We all have conflicts in our regular families, so it is likely that you and your host family will also have conflicts at some point.

It is not disgraceful to have a conflict. It is important, however, to be open about the conflict if it is serious and persists. The key to avoiding conflicts and ending them is COMMUNICATION. You must talk about the conflict with those whom you have the conflict with. Do not use the conflict to complain to friends. Talking about the conflict is hard when the conflict is with your host family because you may feel like a guest in their house and your English skills are not equal to theirs. You should try, however, to resolve the conflict within the family. If you feel you cannot resolve it, talk to the International Student Program Director or Coordinator.

Often, you will find conflicts result from misunderstandings. For example, you may feel your host family doesn't spend enough time with you. Maybe they said something that hurt your feelings. You may be surprised at how much meat they eat and want more rice and vegetables. They cannot try to correct the problem if you do not communicate your concerns. Your host family wants to please you. If you raise problems or concerns, they will try to help you, but they are not mind readers: COMMUNICATE YOUR CONCERNS.

## **Bathroom**

- **A daily shower is common.** Daily shaving is expected for men, unless they have a beard. PCA students are not permitted to have facial hair. Most people use **deodorant** because the smell of body odor is not acceptable in American culture. They brush and floss their teeth every morning and night and sometimes after meals. Those with a tendency towards bad breath use mouthwash.
- **Bathroom floors do not have drains. Keep the water in the sink and in the bathtub. Place the shower curtain INSIDE the bathtub when showering. Dry off INSIDE the tub before getting out.**
- Generally, a shower should last no longer than 10 minutes. Late night showers, although common in some other countries, should be avoided because it is considered impolite to awaken someone with the noise from the running water.
- In America, water from a bath is not shared between people. Empty the tub when finished and rinse the tub, if needed.
- Remove all loose hair from the sink and tub before you leave the bathroom so as not to clog the drain. Put it in a wastebasket (NOT the toilet). Do not remove the drain stopper from the sink or tub. Also remove any hair from the bathroom floor.
- Every person in the family home shares in the duty of cleaning up. When you use the bathroom, make sure that you clean up after yourself. Wipe up water spills, hang towels, and wash out the sink and shower/tub. Empty the waste basket when it starts to get full.
- Clothing should not give off unpleasant smells. Change your clothes daily, especially when they may smell of perspiration. Wash the clothes you wear each week.
- In America, you use toilet tissue to cleanse after using the toilet. The tissue is thrown into the toilet and flushed. Do not put used, soiled tissue in the trash can. Body waste and toilet tissue are the only things that should be flushed down the toilet.
- Women use either tampons or sanitary napkins for menstruation. Wrap these in toilet tissue and put them in the garbage can after use. **DO NOT FLUSH THEM DOWN THE TOILET** as this will damage the plumbing and you may be held responsible for any repairs.
- Basic hygiene products will be provided by the host family. Special needs or wants will be your responsibility.
- Have your host family show you how to shut off the water to the toilet. If the toilet becomes clogged, this will prevent it from overflowing and will avoid damage.
- Notify your host family immediately if there are any water problems in the bathroom.

## **Bedroom**

Your host family is required to provide a separate bed for you, storage space for your personal items, and access to a bathroom. If a separate bedroom is unavailable, you may share a room with a host sibling of the same gender and similar age or another international student of the same gender. Your bed cannot be placed in an open area, such as a family room unless express permission has been given for this by the International Student Program Director. Additionally, you will be provided with adequate storage for clothing and a quiet study area consisting of a desk or table, chair, and adequate lighting to read by. Often this study area will be in a public place such as the dining room or living room.

## Kitchen

Most host family parents provide breakfast and dinner. During the school/work week, breakfasts are informal since everyone quickly eats something before leaving for the day. The food will be very different from what you are accustomed to and the manner of eating will probably be different too.

Dinner will be more like what you may be accustomed to, in the sense that everybody tries to eat dinner together and a parent usually cooks. It may be much earlier than you are accustomed to and sometimes may be rushed if family members have other events or activities planned for the evening. **It is your responsibility to be home for dinner on time.** Do not expect your host mother to be patiently waiting with dinner still warm if you arrive hours later. Instead, you will have to reheat any left-overs or prepare your own dinner.

You are entitled to eat reasonable amounts of food. You share the available food with everyone else. Once everyone has been served, you may ask for more food if you are still hungry and there is food still available. It is not considered rude to ask for more after everyone has been served.

Food is generally passed around the table. Do not reach over someone to grab food or the salt and pepper. Politely ask the others to hand it to you. Say, "Please pass the \_\_\_\_\_." Or "May I have some \_\_\_\_\_?" If it's the last portion, ask, "Does anyone else want any \_\_\_\_\_?"

The food may be very different from what you have at home. The initial smells and sights of food may make it difficult for you. Remember: Trying new foods is part of the host family experience. Be adventurous and open-minded. Adjust to your host family's diet. If certain dishes are unpleasant and others are acceptable, tell your host family so they can try to accommodate you. If you like certain foods or beverages that the family doesn't use, you may request it or buy it yourself.

It is very appropriate to ask your host parent to take you to a local market that sells your home country's food. You may volunteer to cook a meal for your family. Do not cook for yourself regularly. That will insult your host family and could prevent them from using the kitchen at key times.

You should feel free to use the refrigerator, and your host family should provide space in the pantry where you can store your own food items. You are entitled to take light snacks designated for anyone in the family when you have the urge. Any personal items not intended for other family members should be clearly marked to ensure they are not consumed by someone else.

You should ask for assistance initially in preparing breakfast and lunch. Here are some tips:

### Breakfast:

- Cereal is common for breakfast. The family will generally have a few types available – and you may want to join them in food-shopping to help choose. The cereal is placed in a bowl

and cold milk is poured over it. Some people like to slice up fruit – an apple, peach or banana – and add it to the cereal. Some also add sugar, although many cereals are pre-sweetened.

- Toast (heated bread) or frozen waffles are also common at breakfast. A toaster or toaster oven is used to heat these items. If you are unfamiliar with these devices, ask for help.
- More elaborate breakfasts involving eggs or pancakes should be reserved for weekends when there is more time to make breakfast and clean up. If necessary, ask somebody to show you how to cook them.
- The normal drinks for breakfast are coffee, tea, juice and milk.

### Preparing Rice:

You may prefer to make rice for breakfast or lunch, if that is your custom. In America, it is cooked with water in a saucepan (a saucepan is a pot with high sides; a skillet has low sides) or a rice steamer.

Once you become familiar and comfortable with these foods, you will find breakfast and lunch easy to prepare. Take the time to eat a good breakfast and plan a healthy lunch. Do not fall into the trap of skipping breakfast and having junk food only for lunch. This will cause you to lose concentration in your academic work and will also cause you to gain weight. You need a lot of energy to do your best in school.

### **Kitchen Appliances**

Ask your host family how to use all kitchen appliances. Some kitchen appliances or utensils can be dangerous, especially if they are new to you. Some homes have garbage disposals underneath the sink. Do NOT put your hand down the drain. Hot pots should only be handled with oven mitts and should not be set directly on the counter right after being on the stove.

### **Eating Out**

Eating out can be an adventure, as there is a wide variety of food choices in America: fast food, family restaurants, coffee shops, cafeterias, and elegant restaurants. These options vary in price and even in the amount of time you are expected to take for a meal.

Hints for when eating at a restaurant:

- Read the menu carefully for food options and what comes with each meal.
- When you are ready to leave a restaurant where you ordered your food at the table, you can signal to the server with a smile and raised hand to bring you the check or bill to pay for the meal. You should ask, “Excuse me, may I have the check, please?”
- The check/bill will include the cost of all food, drinks and sales tax. It is common to also leave an additional 15-20% for gratuity or tip for your server. However, if dining in a large group, often the gratuity will already be included in the bill, so there is no need to leave an additional tip. Check your bill carefully. If dining at a fast food restaurant (for example, McDonalds), tips are unnecessary.

- If you have not completed your meal, you can ask for a take-home box or bag, often called a “to-go box,” to take your leftovers home.

### **Further Food Notes**

- You will find many Americans eat a lot of meat.
- The potato is probably America’s most common food. It will appear in many different forms. In restaurants, you will generally be asked to choose your favorite type. You will certainly have baked potato, mashed potato, French fries, and potato chips in your new home and, perhaps, other types of potato dishes.
- Eggs are also quite versatile, and again in restaurants you may be asked to pick your favorite type: scrambled, poached, fried, hard-boiled, soft-boiled, and in omelets. In addition, fried eggs can come many ways, either “sunny-side up” which means fried only on one side, or “over easy” which means fried on both sides. You should experiment with all of them!
- You will encounter a variety of salads with an equally wide array of salad dressings to put over them. Generally, people like Ranch, Italian, French, and Caesar salad dressings.
- There are some foods that are unsafe to eat if they are not kept cool.

### **Finances**

Do not keep money around the house, and do not carry a lot of cash with you. If possible, open a bank account to ensure your money is safe. Your host family will help you do this. Be careful with American bills; they are all the same size and color, and it is easy to get them confused. Coins are legal tender in the US and can be used to purchase items.

### **Transportation**

In some areas it may not be safe to walk, especially at night. It is best to talk to your host family about this; they will let you know what areas are safe. They may also set a curfew, which is a time when you must be home, depending on your age. If you intend to ride a bike, you should familiarize yourself with traffic laws and signals. In some areas, it is mandatory that you wear a helmet when on a bicycle. It is always a safe idea to wear one anyway. At night you will need a light on your bike.

### **School/Academic Support**

Classrooms in the US tend to be more informal than what you are used to. You will be expected to express your opinions at the invitation of the teacher. If you do not understand something, ASK YOUR TEACHER. You can do this during, just before, or after class. You may also meet with your teacher during his/her office hours, at lunch or after school. If you don’t ask questions, your teacher will assume you understand everything.

### **Social Interactions**

Here are some things to be aware of when you are in a public place:

Make sure your voice is not too loud.

Keep to the right side of the road, sidewalk, stairs or on escalators.

Wait in line if you are in a place where there are a lot of people; do not push ahead of anyone.

Try not to block the view of other people if you are at a sporting event, movie, concert, or somewhere where people are trying to watch something.

For parties or social events, you typically do not want to be more than 15 minutes late. If you will be more than an hour late, you should inform the host of the event. At parties, people often wander around meeting other people. Sometimes people pass food around. The idea of equality is true for parties too. Everyone serves each other, and men and women will take on this task the same way. A “potluck” party is a time when everyone brings a food dish to be shared with the others. Sometimes you will be asked in advance what you are bringing, but often everyone brings whatever they want.

### **Shopping**

Shopping may be confusing because there are so many stores that sell similar things. It is helpful to talk with your host family to find out where the best bargains and best quality can be found. It is not common to bargain in stores. The price of the good is considered “fixed” or set. However, taxes will be added at payment time. The taxes vary by location and sometimes by the type of goods. You should treat the clerks as equals. However, it is perfectly fine to tell them if you are not interested in purchasing any items.

## **QUESTIONS**

We hope this International Student Handbook will help you to understand what is expected of you as a student at PCA. Understand that no set of written guidelines can anticipate every situation that may occur and that PCA reserves the right to take such actions as it deems necessary regarding any matter that arises while you are a student with us. Should you have any questions about these policies or any other matter while a student at PCA, you can speak with the Director or Coordinator of the International Student Program.

**We wish you a great year at Prestonwood Christian Academy!!**