



YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada



HOST GUIDE

Welcome

The reciprocal homestay aspect is an integral part of YMCA exchanges and fundamental to the experiential learning process. Staying with a local family from the host community allows youth participants the opportunity to immerse themselves in the culture of the local community and lets them improve their understanding and knowledge of the diversity of Canada.

Parents / Guardians are an important partner in our program. As hosts to youth for the exchange, their role is not only to provide lodging and meals for a visitor but to act as additional support for them. Hosts are responsible for the participant staying with them and provide a safe environment for the youth to live and experience another home, language and local culture.

Alternate Exchange Hosts

Due to the reciprocal nature of the program, some youth who would like to go on exchange might not be able to do so because their family cannot host in return (because of health, work schedule, language, and other reasons). Alternate exchange hosts play a key role in the exchange by providing a safe and healthy living environment for our participants, sharing their life experience and knowledge of their community.

The YMCA

The YMCA was established over 150 years ago as a charity dedicated to the health of both individuals and communities. Our focus on inclusiveness and accessibility means we serve people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities through all stages of life. We bring years of collective experience to this program as we have been operating exchange programs both nationally and internationally since 1976.

Our Mission

The YMCA is a charity offering opportunities for personal growth, community involvement, and leadership.

Our Vision

Our communities will be home to the healthiest children, teens and young adults.

Our Values

The YMCA is guided by certain values that inform the way we act and the decisions we make:

Caring - we act with compassion and concern for the well-being of others

Health - we are committed to physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development

Honesty - we demonstrate integrity and trustworthiness

Inclusiveness - we appreciate diversity, strive to be open to all, and seek to understand differences and find common ground

Respect - we recognize and protect the inherent worth of every person, including oneself

Responsibility - we are dependable and accountable for choices, actions, and commitments

Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Understanding your roles	10
Getting Ready	12
Arrival	13
Getting Settled	14
Culture Shock and homesickness	16
Strategies	17
In Case of Emergency	19
Guidelines for Hosts	20
Guidelines for Youth	21
Conclusion	22

Introduction

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada gives Canadian youth aged 12 to 17 a chance to expand their vision of themselves and their country. We facilitate exchanges between two groups of equal size in different communities. Each group hosts the other group. Groups have 10 to 30 participants of approximately the same age.

Exchange activities—preparing to travel, travelling and hosting, doing follow-up events—are opportunities for participants to work with their community, develop interpersonal and group skills, and learn about the diversity of Canada’s people.

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada is open to groups from all regions, cultures, religions, ethnic groups and economic circumstances.

The average length of an exchange is seven to ten days (minimum five) in the host community.

Funding

The Government of Canada, through the YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada Program, funds special measures and the travel costs between communities. Groups are responsible for other costs such as local activities and local transportation for both groups while you are hosting.

Program Objectives

- Contribute to improved knowledge and understanding of Canada among Canadian youth, enabling them to learn first-hand about the history, geography, economy, institutions, cultures, communities, languages and other facets of their country.
- Help young Canadians connect to one another and create links throughout the country and among groups, thereby helping to strengthen the fabric of Canadian society.
- Develop Canadian identity and attachment to Canada among youth by enhancing appreciation of both the diversity and the shared aspects of the Canadian experience.
- Contribute to the development of leadership skills in young Canadians.
- Foster a stronger sense of community by providing opportunities for youth to become actively engaged in their own and other communities in Canada.

YMCA Diversity and Social Inclusion Statement

The YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada Program recognizes and values diversity and social inclusion as underpinnings of what we stand for and what we do. We regard the diversity of people and communities as assets and recognize their contribution to the social, political and cultural enrichment of Canada.

As a socially inclusive YMCA, we ensure that diverse individuals and communities share in power, give voice effectively to their issues, are involved in decision-making processes and have fair access to information and services. We also challenge specific forms of exclusion, including systematic barriers.

Screening hosts

Every participant has the right to stay in a safe and secure environment, thus all participants and hosts must take part in a screening process. This includes Group Leaders or any other chaperones that will be hosting youth in their home.

Group Leaders are expected to see that reference checks are done with the utmost respect for families and their privacy, while gaining assurance that the family will be a suitable host.

As the organizing body, the YMCA needs to ensure that all participants going on exchange have safe and suitable accommodations during their time in the host community. It is a mandatory requirement that every potential host go through YMCA's screening process. A police record check is not included and does not replace this process, though some participating organizations or school boards/districts may require it. Speak with your Group Leader for more information.

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada Hosting Contract

- I agree to respect the culture and values of the participant. I will not discriminate or permit any discrimination by reason of race, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender, ability, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, place of birth or language of a participant.
- I agree to host the participant(s) and provide accommodation (personal sleeping space, adequate toilet facilities), meals and snacks as outlined on the host plan provided by the Group Leader and arrange approved local transportation for the duration of the exchange.
- I have provided the names of three references (not related) and understand that you will call at least two of them. I understand that the contents of this application will remain confidential. I understand that host family screening is mandatory for participation in this national exchange program and I will take part in the specific procedures put in place by the group organizer in this regard.
- I agree to notify the group organizer in a timely manner if any changes need to be made to the billeting arrangements.
- I agree to provide adult supervision and take full responsibility for the participant(s) while they are hosted in my home. I will provide a safe and secure environment.
- I will provide whatever help is needed in getting a sick participant to a doctor or hospital and to inform the group leader immediately of what action has been taken.
- I have read the above responsibilities as a host and I am willing to undertake this responsibility and will receive as a guest in my home a billet(s) with all of the privileges and responsibilities which this entails.

Role of the Group Leader

The Group Leader

- chooses the group members and makes sure each is matched with a participant from the twin group
- makes sure the hosts are screened
- promotes interaction among group members

organizes for the group

- leads members in planning and implementing the orientation, host program and follow-up phases
- organizes the evaluation process
- helps group members develop leadership and interpersonal skills
- advises group members to carry adequate liability insurance
- is aware of any medical issues

travels with the group

- participates in and supervises the group while visiting the twin community
- has a plan to deal with medical or other emergencies
- works with members to resolve personal and group difficulties that arise
- promotes interaction among members of both groups
- links the group and the YMCA Youth Exchange office and stays in regular contact with their Regional Coordinator

makes arrangements

- completes all required forms, including the Group Leader evaluation form
- receives and reviews all travel documents from the travel agent.

Role of...

Participants

- participate in all phases of the exchange: planning, travelling and hosting, and following up
- share ideas and suggestions
- bring commitment and energy to the exchange process

Role of the parents/ guardians

- encourage group members to take part in all phases of the exchange
- provide a safe, welcoming place and appropriate supervision for twin group members
- participate in fundraising and other exchange activities.

Role of the YMCA

- co-ordinate the exchange, including all travel to and from the twin community, and assist your group in finding a twin
- support Group Leaders by answering questions and providing written materials
- link each exchange to the national network.

Getting Ready

Some hosts find it helpful and reassuring to introduce themselves to the twin parents/ guardians before the exchange. You can telephone, write, or, particularly if there are language differences, send photographs of yourself, your home and other family members.

Write

Spend time corresponding. Ideally, twins should write to each other several times; describing school, family life, favourite sports and hobbies, the languages they speak. Remember that not everyone may have access to e-mail so it may be more effective to send "snail mail" .

Photo

Past participants have enjoyed exchanging photos. It's a good idea to discuss photos, reminding ourselves that stereotypes, biases and assumptions can easily be drawn from pictures.

Video

Make a video of your home and send to your guest. This gives your guest a look at your home "in action."

Postcards

For participants that aren't letter-writers, try postcards. Write on a postcard one thing you would want your guest to know about you and one thing about your community.

Setting up Space

Make sure your guest has their own sleeping space, fresh linens and a towel.

Events and Activities

Have you considered some fun local activities you can share with your guest?

Arrival

First Day Questions

This series of questions is intended to help both the participant and host understand what is expected of them, and minimize misunderstandings. You should add your own questions and write down answers for later reference.

Introduction

- What should I call you?
- What are you interested in?
- What kind of things do you do at home?

Meals

- What time are meals served at your home?
- How do you help out at meal time?
- Do you eat together or separately at home?

Laundry

- Do you do your own laundry at home?

Notes:

Chores

What chores do you do at home?

Leisure

When do you usually watch television at home?
What are the rules around cell phone use at home?
How much time do you spend on the Internet at home?

Space

When do you usually shower or bath at home?
Do you like to spend a lot of time with your family or do you prefer alone time?

Notes:

Getting Settled

Getting off on the right foot

- Do a home tour
- Discuss house norms – cleaning, language, clothes and bedroom etiquette, laundry
- Discuss communication – phone and internet use
- Discuss meals – what time, structure, dishes
- What are the house ground rules regarding guests, etc.

One group had a handout of what group members should remember when their twin group was visiting. Here's what they suggested:

- Ask your twin many times during the day if they are hungry, tired, comfortable, if they need or want anything. Make them feel at home
- Introduce them to all your other friends and family
- Tell them as much as you know about your home town
- Go to the Group Leader if you feel any problems developing
- We have many activities planned—please be available to help set up, clean up or do whatever is required to make things run smoothly
- Have a good time!

Culture Shock and homesickness

This is the most common problem encountered as some young participants find themselves in a new environment where they may not be comfortable or know what is expected of them. It is usually temporary.

Your guest might show some of the following symptoms:

- wanting to spend a lot of time alone
- crying frequently or even constantly
- seeming thoroughly bored even though there are many possible activities
- Making contact ahead of time will help to alleviate some of the shyness or discomfort your visitor may feel

If you have a participant who appears to be, or who has indicated, that they are homesick let the Group Leader know so that the situation can be monitored. Most situations resolve themselves quickly after the initial uneasiness has worn off. The best solution is usually to keep the participant busy and as involved as possible in activities. Be patient and supportive. It may be the first time your visitor is away from home.

Strategies

Watch, look, listen

Make full use of observation skills. Look for patterns in behaviour, keeping in mind that everyone is an individual and it can be easy to misinterpret a pattern. Be careful about making generalizations, both positive and negative. Use “I” statements, like “I have observed...” or “I feel that...” instead of “They do” or “We all like...”

Try things out

Ask questions. Learn some new vocabulary. Build friendships. Know that you’ll make mistakes—and that’s fine.

Notice reactions—yours and theirs

Keep a journal. Write a letter. Don’t worry about “understanding” everything. It doesn’t have to make sense.

Find a “comfort zone”

Do an activity that is comfortable and familiar for your guests once a day.

Laugh—as much as and as often as you can

Adapted from G. Ball, YMCA Geneva Park Centre

Liability Insurance

Hosts are responsible for their exchange guest in the same way that they would be for any other visitor in their home. Should a participant be hurt or injured while in the home of the Host, the liability insurance carried by the Host will offer the necessary protection from any action taken as a result of accidents of this kind.

Driving to Activities

We often need hosts' support to get the participants to the activity locations. We encourage each community to establish a contact list and car pooling schedule to help the environment and each other.

For more information on activities please review the host plan and consult your Group Leader for specific days and times of the events.

In case of emergency

Your Group Leaders are on call 24/7 during the exchange period. You should also be provided with an emergency response plan.

Problem Solving

All exchange participants and hosts will be exposed to different situations that they are not used to. If your child calls home with a concern, please remain calm, listen to what they have to say and offer words of support and encouragement. We have worked through many challenges in the past and have developed a system to best serve hosts and participants:

1. Your child should address issues with their Group Leader.
2. Parents should address concerns with the Group Leader.
3. If the problem has not been solved at this point, the Group Leader will contact the Regional Coordinator(s) who will be consulted and in turn may consult the National Manager of the program.

Guidelines for Hosts

How to be a great host

- Take responsibility for the participant's safety while in your home by providing adult supervision in the evenings and overnight.
- Create a welcoming environment for the youth. Involve them in your day-to-day life and activities.
- Stay fully informed by keeping lines of communication open with your Group Leader at all times.
- Discuss your expectations with the participant at the beginning: Have the same expectations for the participant you have for your own child around household chores, behaviour, house rules, etc. Remember that your rules are different from those of their parents and good communication will be needed.
- Enjoy the experience of having someone new in your home. Take advantage of the opportunity to teach someone about your way of life and learn about their culture.
- There will be cultural, language, economic, spiritual and other differences between participants and families. Accept and welcome these differences, diversity is what makes Canada great.

Guidelines for Youth

- Have fun! However, remember that you have responsibilities which include, participating in activities, and being respectful of your host family.
- Adhere to the expectations of the program outlined in the participant code of conduct.
- If you are on a bilingual exchange – practice the other language!
- Ask for help. Don't be shy about asking people to speak slower or repeat themselves.
- Look after your safety and if in doubt, call your Group Leader.
- Bring a phone card for calling home. You can use it at the host family's house or at a payphone if you are away.
- Make an effort to get involved in your host family's regular activities. You'll get to know them, and they'll get to know you.
- Dress comfortably and for the weather.
- Keep a journal/blog and take lots of photos!
- Sleep! All that change and excitement can get a bit tiring.

Conclusion Note

Please be sure to complete our program evaluation that will be sent to you at the end of the program. We would love to hear from you.

Thanks and good luck!

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