

# HOMESTAY FAMILY GUIDE

A guide for Victorian government schools  
parent-nominated and school-sourced  
homestay families

Melbourne, Australia

Department of Education



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## THE HOMESTAY EXPERIENCE IS A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD LIFELONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES ACROSS THE GLOBE.

For homestay students, the bond they share with their homestay family is one of the most important, and memorable, aspects of their Victorian study experience.

Shared experiences, regular conversation and the discovery of common interests always take a little extra time and patience, but will be well worth the effort!

Regardless of the background or age of your homestay student, each will appreciate a welcoming and warm environment that feels like home.

While some students may be shy, or more or less social than others, don't be afraid to include them in your family discussions, outings and daily life. The more you are able to put into welcoming your homestay student as part of the family, the more each of you will gain from the homestay experience.

# Homestay Family Guide

This homestay family guide aims to ensure that everyone has the best possible experience while your homestay student lives and studies in Victoria. This includes ensuring that your homestay student feels safe and secure throughout their homestay experience.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to give you the resources you need to:



prepare for the arrival of your homestay student



help you feel comfortable acting as a homestay family



connect you with the tools and guidance to access the support you may need along the way



get the most out of the experience of hosting an international student.

### Policies and legislation

#### Child Safe

The Department of Education and Training and Victorian government schools are committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. We demonstrate this commitment by providing information, support and processes to our students, staff and homestay families to provide for our students' safety and wellbeing, and to help create child-safe environments appropriate for their diverse backgrounds.

Students can expect to be safe and to feel safe, wherever they go and whatever they do. Students can expect that adults at their school know how to keep them safe. You must listen to student concerns and are required take action under the law to report allegations of child abuse and neglect under the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

For more information see:

Child Safe <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/safeenviro.aspx>

Reportable Conduct Scheme <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/reportableconduct.aspx>

### Working with Children Check

All persons aged 18 years or over residing in your home, must hold a valid Working with Children Check (WWCC), including your own children and other homestay students aged 18 years or over.

**Please note, if there are any changes to your household members during your student's homestay period, it is important to get in touch with your host school's International Student Coordinator (ISC).**

New household members aged 18 years or over, and residents who turn 18 while you remain a homestay family will require a valid WWCC. Images of new pets and any physical changes to the residence (e.g. a renovation) are also required to be provided to your ISC for inclusion in your homestay profile.

Easily apply for a valid Victorian WWCC online here: <https://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au>

### Homestay policy

To provide greater assurance for everyone, the Department requires that all homestay families have a homestay policy and agreement in place with the school prior to welcoming any international students.

Get in touch with your host school's ISC if you have not received a copy of the school's homestay policy and agreement documents.

### Homestay insurance policies

Homestay families are required to ensure students' belongings are covered under your home and contents insurance policy. Speak to your ISC for more information.





## GETTING TO KNOW YOUR HOMESTAY STUDENT BEFORE THEY ARRIVE

**As a homestay family you are there to provide support and a comfortable home for your homestay student during their time in Victoria.**

You will be allocated a homestay student at least four weeks prior to their arrival. Basic details about your home and family – including who resides at your property and photographs of your home – will then be forwarded to your homestay student.

Before your homestay student arrives in Victoria it is possible to contact them and begin getting to know them.

This contact may be initiated by your homestay student or you may choose to initiate this process yourself. Simply ask the ISC at your host school and they will help facilitate the best form of contact.

**AS A HOMESTAY FAMILY YOU ARE THERE TO PROVIDE SUPPORT AND A COMFORTABLE HOME FOR YOUR HOMESTAY STUDENT DURING THEIR TIME IN VICTORIA.**

## HOMESTAY FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

It is exciting to have a new member joining your family and we hope that your experience of being a homestay provider is culturally enriching and positive for all members of your household!

### What you are expected to provide your homestay student

Homestay families are expected to provide:



a safe, secure, welcoming place to live



a household compliant with the Child Safe Standards



a separate single room for the student's use



three meals a day, seven days a week, including snacks (see 'Food' section for more information)



facilities – a bed, wardrobe, towels and linen



utilities – gas, electricity, heating and water costs, internet



cleaning services of common living areas



use of living areas within the residence



study facilities – a desk, study light and bookcase



attendance at parent/teacher evenings on behalf of your homestay student's natural parents.

Some students may choose to purchase their own snacks and personal items based on their individual preferences.

**If you have any concerns, or require any assistance, please contact your host school's ISC.**

## SUGGESTED HOMESTAY PRE-ARRIVAL CHECKLIST

Before your homestay student arrives, it's important that you ensure:

- ✓ all legal and policy documentation is complete and up to date
- ✓ your homestay student's room is clean, tidy and welcoming. If the weather is cold, please ensure the room is warm on arrival
- ✓ fresh towels and linen are provided
- ✓ snacks are available and you have a suitable meal ready for your homestay student, who will likely be tired and hungry on arrival after a long flight
- ✓ house rules have been considered and agreed upon by current household members (see 'House rules' section for more information).



## WHEN YOUR HOMESTAY STUDENT ARRIVES

### Pick up and drop off

Your host school is responsible for collecting your homestay student from the airport. You are welcome to accompany your host school representative or ISC to greet your homestay student at the airport when they arrive.

If you are able to do this, please inform your ISC as soon as possible. Note that this is optional and not a requirement of being a homestay provider.

### Meeting your homestay student

If you have not met your homestay student at the airport, you are required to greet and welcome your homestay student when they arrive at your home for the first time.

Remember, this may be an overwhelming moment for your homestay student! They are in a completely new home in a new country, and often have a new language to master and adapt to. It may take them a little time to warm up to their new circumstances, new family and new environment.

### Meeting your homestay student's family

Sometimes, students will be accompanied by a family member when they first arrive in Australia. You are not expected to provide accommodation for anyone other than your host student, unless you wish to do so. However, if your student's family does travel with them, or visits at a later date, you may wish to meet them, for example by inviting them for dinner.

### What you should expect when your homestay student arrives

For many homestay students it is a long flight to Victoria, so while they will be very excited to meet you, they may also feel disoriented, tired, hungry and in need of a shower. Many homestay students also report feeling cold on arrival – a warm home is appreciated!

It is a great idea to have some snacks, hot drinks or even a light meal on hand. It is also helpful to encourage your homestay student to get in touch with their family back home to let them know that they have arrived safely.

Once you have welcomed your homestay student and shown them around their new home, it can be a good idea to give them some alone time and space to rest. Remember though, that too much time alone in a bedroom is not a positive strategy for settling in.

If you can, take your homestay student on a tour of the local area within 24 hours of their arrival. They will appreciate being shown the local shops, transport, pharmacy, local landmarks and so on.

### Important information you need to tell your homestay student when they arrive

It is a great idea to make sure that your homestay student has some key items and details on hand before they venture out of the house alone. Some essentials include:



a house key



an Australian SIM card set up and ready to go



your mobile phone number saved to their phone



the host school's ISC's contact details



their Student Safety Card (your host school representative/ISC will provide this to your homestay student on arrival).

It is also good to make sure they have some useful apps and travel information saved on their phone, including:



Google Maps



the Public Transport Victoria (PTV) app (note that in order to download local apps the student may need to reset their app store to Australia (i.e. Apple App Store or Google Play Store)



Uber (note that in order to use Uber, a visa or mastercard debit card is required)



your home address and nearest public transport stops saved somewhere on their phone.

Top tip: It's a good idea to write down the home network name and password and leave this in the student's room, so they can connect each of their devices in their own time.

### Bonding with your homestay student

A homestay experience is a fantastic way for international students to truly understand and enjoy Victoria. We aim for every homestay to be a positive, memorable and rewarding experience for all involved.

### Introducing your local area

Consider making the most of the first few days with your homestay student by planning a few bonding activities. International students love seeing and learning about their new home city!

Consider planning one or more of these family outings:



Melbourne Zoo



Melbourne Museum



Royal Botanic Gardens



St Kilda Pier and foreshore



National Gallery of Victoria



AFL or cricket match at the MCG



laneways and street art in the CBD



Melbourne Star and Docklands precinct



brunch or lunch at a local, city or beach-side café

### Other tourist destinations

#### Bonding through everyday activities and events

You will be more likely to develop a positive relationship with your homestay student if you involve them in family life. Eating meals together and including your homestay student in family outings and even simple things like shopping trips are good ways to build connections.

Also try to encourage your homestay student to attend Department-organised homestay student experience events. These are great opportunities to get to know other homestay students and families and importantly to make friends.

**CONSIDER MAKING THE MOST OF THE FIRST FEW DAYS WITH YOUR HOMESTAY STUDENT BY PLANNING A FEW BONDING ACTIVITIES. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS LOVE SEEING AND LEARNING ABOUT THEIR NEW HOME CITY!**



## COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

### Communicating when English is not a first language

For nearly all homestay students, English will not be their first language and they will have varying degrees of English language capability. For example, some students who are undertaking Intensive English language classes may not understand much English, yet other students who already have English language skills may not be talkative at first as they may be a little shy.

Here are a few tried and tested tips to overcome the language barrier and keep lines of communication open.

- Frame conversation in a simple manner: try not to overcomplicate sentences, avoid complex questions, avoid double negatives and use simple language to convey your message.
- Download translation apps: technology is your friend! Download a translation app such as Google Translate for when things get tricky.
- Hold regular household meetings: organise regular household discussions (these can even be held over dinner) to check in and ensure everyone is feeling comfortable.

### Tips on cultural differences

All cultures, upbringings and family circumstances are different. There may be a short period of adjustment at the start of your homestay student's experience. This is to be expected, and fortunately most issues can be quickly resolved. Behaviour and social norms (i.e. manners and etiquette) are potential sticking points, simply because of the differences that exist between countries, cultures and individual families.

Be sensitive and remember that settling in takes time. If an issue does arise, try to encourage positive discussion and look to find a solution that works for all members of your household. If you need some help, be sure to

contact your host school's ISC for tips and guidance.

Remember, your homestay student is a teenager. Not all teenagers are self-sufficient and some may need more support adapting to new expectations and ways of doing things than others.

### Keeping your homestay student's natural parents in the loop

There are many different ways to keep your homestay student's family up-to-date with everything that is going on in their life. If you prefer a formal style of communication perhaps exchange **email addresses**. If you prefer more casual communication tools, you may wish to use apps such as **WhatsApp, WeChat** or **Skype** so that you can text and make phone calls.

Many homestay families send regular photos and updates to their student's natural parents. We encourage homestay families to establish communication channels and contact frequencies that suit all parties.







## SETTLING IN: INTRODUCING YOUR HOMESTAY STUDENT TO THEIR NEW HOME

Here are a few general guidelines that may help you introduce your homestay student to their new home.

### Drinking water

In many countries the tap water is undrinkable. This means your student may expect filtered or bottled water.

You may need to explain that Victorian tap water is completely safe to drink, particularly if filtered or bottled drinking water is not available in your home.

### Food

The quality and availability of food makes a big difference to the homestay experience!

Always take a moment to check if your homestay student has any dietary requirements or allergies.

It is a nice idea (and can be an ice breaker!) to introduce them to common local foods, for example:

- chicken parma
- meat pie
- fish and chips
- Vegemite
- Tim Tams
- BBQ shapes.

### Food and meal tips

#### How much, and what sort, of food you should provide

Your Homestay Provider Agreement outlines expectations around food. This includes three meals per day, plus snacks. Show your homestay student where in the pantry they can find snack foods, and let them know which foods they can help themselves to. Within reason, your homestay student should feel comfortable helping themselves to snacks when they feel hungry.

#### Home-cooked meals

As a homestay family you are required to provide three nourishing meals each day, home cooked where possible/practical. These meals don't have to be 'gourmet'. Leftovers are acceptable, particularly for school lunches the next day.

Meals should be healthy and nutritious. Instant noodles are not considered a meal on their own – these would be considered a snack.

### Student menu preferences

There are often cultural differences between the food expectations of international students and what Victorian families might consider as standard.

International students tend to expect a meal of vegetables, meat and some form of carbohydrate (such as rice, noodles or pasta) for both lunch and dinner. Depending on the cultural background of your homestay student, rice may be preferred. For example, if you are having meat and vegetables for dinner, consider cooking some rice as a side.

Sandwiches are rarely considered sufficient for lunch by many international cultures, particularly across Asia.

Of course part of the experience of living and studying overseas involves adapting to new and different ways of doing things. This process can take time though, and many homestay students will appreciate – at least initially – eating meals that are similar to what they have been used to in their home country.

### Good snack ideas

Snacks should be readily available and may include:

- fruit (like bananas, apples and pears)
- vegetables (like carrots, celery, cucumber)
- muesli bars
- yoghurt
- popcorn
- rice crackers
- biscuits – sweet or savoury
- crackers and cheese or dip
- instant noodles.

### Utensils and cutlery

Some homestay students may not be familiar with western-style cutlery. Please take the time to teach them how to use a knife, fork and spoon, if necessary. Always give them the opportunity to use their own cutlery (e.g. chopsticks), if they prefer.

### Household appliances

Encourage open lines of communication regarding the use of household appliances. Don't forget that everything from the washing machine to the kettle to the oven might operate a little differently. It is a good idea to show your homestay student how to operate each appliance correctly before they get started. Discuss with your homestay student which appliances you prefer they not use unsupervised.

### Bed linen

At a minimum, please ensure your homestay student receives:

- pillow cases
- bottom and top sheets
- quilt/doona and covers.

Since Victoria can be cold during the winter, always let your homestay student know where to find extra blankets when they feel cold.

### Household cleanliness

Students are expected to keep their room tidy and pick up after themselves. You could also ask them to help with basic household chores such as setting the table before meals and washing the dishes or loading/unpacking the dishwasher. You may need to show students how to complete these tasks first as this is likely to be the first time that they have lived away from their natural parents.

If household cleanliness starts to become an area of concern, please contact your ISC, who can suggest positive ways to manage this day-to-day aspect of sharing your home.

**ENCOURAGE OPEN LINES OF COMMUNICATION REGARDING THE USE OF HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES. DON'T FORGET THAT EVERYTHING FROM THE WASHING MACHINE TO THE KETTLE TO THE OVEN MIGHT OPERATE A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY.**

### Bathroom etiquette

International students may not pay the same consideration to water usage that many Victorian families do as they have often lived in countries without water restrictions.

It is a good idea to explain at the start of their stay that water is regarded as a scarce resource in Victoria, with many households taking extra measures to conserve it, particularly using bathroom facilities.

You may like to suggest the following as best practice:

- avoid showers longer than 10 minutes. A 5–10 minute shower is best, noting that students with longer hair may require more time
- always turn off taps properly after use
- only flush toilet paper down the toilet as other items (e.g. sanitary items) will block the toilet.

You may also want to remind students of the importance of regular hand washing, and provide hand-washing facilities including soap and a towel.

### Laundry

It is a good idea to discuss laundry with your homestay student. If they are more comfortable doing their own laundry or most of their laundry, this is completely fine. You may want to show them where the washing detergent is kept, how much to use and how to use the machine.

### House rules: a general outline of typical homestay family rules

We understand that all families are different and have a unique set of expectations and 'house rules'. Individual schools also communicate a basic set of house rules to each homestay student. These general house rules cover expectations including:



appropriate behaviour



cleaning/chores



use of common facilities (eg bathroom, kitchen, laundry)



curfews



noise levels



internet use



approval of any overnight stays



going out with friends



overseas guests.

### Respectful behaviour

Politeness is expected of homestay students throughout their time in Victoria and that they will respect all members of their homestay household. This extends to areas such as:

- socialising – it is expected that homestay students will positively engage with their homestay family
- alone time – try to encourage your homestay student not to spend too much time on their own in their bedroom (tip: you may wish to encourage your student to study in communal areas in addition to their room)
- utility usage – be clear about any boundaries around TV, and internet, water and power usage to minimise misunderstandings.

It is a good idea to discuss with your homestay student what they consider to be respectful behaviour from their cultural perspective. For example, they may like you to knock on the door before entering their room.





## PERSONAL SAFETY

It is vital that your homestay student always keeps you, and their ISC, informed of their schedule and any changes to their whereabouts, particularly if they won't make it home on time or plan to go out with friends.

Remind your homestay student that they should always feel comfortable to get in touch. If they get lost while they are out or feel unsafe, they should contact you or their ISC immediately.

Your homestay student will be provided with a student safety card by their ISC when they arrive in Victoria. This card should be kept with them at all times. It is also a good idea for them to save a photo of the card to their phone. Make sure you have these contact details on your phone as well.

**If you have any questions or concerns regarding personal safety and communication please get in touch with your host school's ISC.**

**IT IS VITAL THAT YOUR HOMESTAY STUDENT ALWAYS KEEPS YOU, AND THEIR ISC, INFORMED OF THEIR SCHEDULE AND ANY CHANGES TO THEIR WHEREABOUTS, PARTICULARLY IF THEY WON'T MAKE IT HOME ON TIME OR PLAN TO GO OUT WITH FRIENDS.**

## TRAVEL, OVERNIGHT STAYS AND VISITING FAMILY MEMBERS

### Visits by a homestay student's family

If your homestay student's family would like to visit, it is important that they notify you before their arrival. You are not required to accommodate any additional persons in your home, unless you would like to.

### Staying with friends

If your homestay student would like to spend the night away from your home, they must obtain written permission from you, their natural parents and their ISC.

### Holidays

There are many opportunities throughout the year for your homestay student to explore Australia or plan a visit back home. They must always notify you and their ISC of their travel plans. Travel is not permitted during the school term and there are a range of extra requirements if students travel while remaining in Australia and under the Department's welfare responsibility.

For more detail, please refer to the Department's international student travel policy which is included in the terms and conditions in your written agreement.



## TAKING CARE OF HOMESTAY STUDENT HEALTH

While homestay students are away from home it is still important that they take care of their physical health and mental wellbeing.

Changes to lifestyle, food and general environment can sometimes lead to feeling under the weather. For some students, living away from close family and friends, adapting to a new culture and keeping up with studies can be stressful.

It is a good idea to explain to your homestay student they can always talk to you, their ISC or a doctor if they have any physical or mental health concerns. In some instances, schools will also have a doctor, nurse or first-aid-qualified teachers on site that can be accessed by students.

Depending on how confident the student is, they may choose to organise this themselves, or they may need advice and support from you or their ISC to do so. (Please refer to the 'Seeing a doctor' section for more details).

### Seeing a doctor: how to book an appointment

When guiding international students through the process of booking a doctor's appointment it is important to remember they will need their Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) card.

Remind students that they can request to see their preferred doctor, a doctor of a particular gender and / or a doctor who speaks their native language. Often their school's ISC has a list of suitable doctors in the local area that they can provide you.

It is important to consider that doctors can also help with mental health. Should you have any concerns about your homestay student's health, mental health and wellbeing, you have a responsibility to raise this with the school's ISC immediately.

**Remember, your homestay student's ISC is contactable 24 hours, 7 days a week.**

IT IS A GOOD IDEA TO EXPLAIN TO YOUR HOMESTAY STUDENT THEY CAN ALWAYS TALK TO YOU, THEIR ISC OR A DOCTOR IF THEY HAVE ANY PHYSICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS.





## BULLYING

**Victorian schools are welcoming environments where respectful behaviour is expected, modelled and encouraged. Every Victorian school has a zero tolerance policy around bullying.**

**Bullying can be any harmful or aggressive behaviours. It can take the form of emotional, physical or online bullying, often known as cyber bullying.**

### **What to do if your homestay student experiences bullying**

If your homestay student reports having been bullied at school, it is important to get in touch with their ISC (or encourage the student to do so) in order to address and resolve the issue.

Your host school is well equipped to help your homestay student in these circumstances, and will also provide suggestions around how you can support your homestay student in the event that they experience bullying at school. It is important to follow up with the student and school ISC regularly to ensure the matter is fully resolved.

### **Bully Stoppers**

Bully Stoppers is a website where you and your international student can get more information or find someone to talk to confidentially. For more information, see: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/default.aspx>

## SCHOOL RULES

Individual schools have their own school rules and these will be provided to your homestay student as part of their orientation. You may wish to obtain a copy of these for yourself.



## CRITICAL INCIDENTS AND EMERGENCIES

Critical incidents and emergencies are rare, but it's still important to be prepared. Below are a few general guidelines to follow if you are faced with a critical incident or an emergency that involves your homestay student.

### Critical incidents and emergencies

Critical incidents or emergency situations include:

- a missing student or student that unexpectedly does not come home one evening
- losing contact with your homestay student for an extended period, e.g. anything over 2 to 4 hours
- extreme weather conditions and natural disasters
- medical emergencies.

### What to do in case of a critical incident or an emergency

If you or your homestay student are involved in a critical incident or an emergency, you must always notify your student's ISC and natural parents as soon as possible.

Please review the Health and Safety section of Study Vic website for further information on what to do during an emergency scenario: <https://www.study.vic.gov.au/en/living-in-victoria/health-and-safety/Pages/default.aspx>.

## HOMESTAY PAYMENTS

All payments must be paid electronically. Speak to your host school's ISC to discuss good practice relating to homestay payments. This ensures that students are not involved in the homestay payment process as this can create unnecessary stress.



# Thank you

**We hope you enjoy the experience of being a homestay parent!**

Thank you for being part of this highly regarded Victorian program, and for helping to provide an international student with the experience of a lifetime!



## **Victorian Government Schools**

### **International Student Program**

Department of Education

GPO Box 4367, Melbourne Victoria 3001,  
Australia

Email: [international@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:international@education.vic.gov.au)

Web: [www.study.vic.gov.au](http://www.study.vic.gov.au)

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