



## Bridges:Friends of Internationals

# A Guide to Thanksgiving Hosting for Host Families

This guide has everything you need to know about hosting an international student for Thanksgiving.

We are so glad that you are opening your home this Thanksgiving, and that you have decided to show Christ's love in such a tangible way!

Please read this whole document: it will help you make the most of your hosting opportunity with international students.

# Common Questions and Answers for Hosts

**How does this work?** In the week leading up to Thanksgiving, you'll be assigned two or more students to spend Thanksgiving at your house. We'll email you the name and contact info of your student, and your students will also receive your contact info. You should initiate contact by November 20th (since you are the host).



The plans, schedule, and extent of what you do with your students is in your hands- you are the hosts, and can have the students stay at your house for as long, or as short of a time as you wish. A good idea also is to notify your other guests that you will have these guests joining you at Thanksgiving. It's good to prepare your other friends and family for the people you are hosting.

**How can I prepare?** There are a lot of great tips below, but the most important thing you can do to prepare is **pray!**

Pray that God would work in students hearts, pray that the conversations would go well, that you would be able to communicate clearly, that they would sense the love of Jesus in your home, and that all the details will work out well as you prepare to pick up the students. When you finally finish praying... ask your friends and family to pray also!

**Who should initiate the contact?** You should. Many international students feel like "guests" here, and may feel it too "forward" to call you. Make sure they have your telephone number and address, just in case they need to get in touch with you. We recommend that you email them at first, but often times, the best way to communicate with students is by texting. Also, when you contact them, please tell them a little bit about your plans for Thanksgiving Day - it is always nice for the students to know what to expect!

**Important note: If your student is unresponsive to your invitation after 3 days, please contact us and we will do our best to find you an alternate student.**

### **How will the students find our home?**

If they have a car and can drive, send them your address, but the majority of our students do not have transportation, so the best thing would be for you to pick them up. Be clear about where you will meet them and the time. If you need directions to the University of Bridgeport, please let us



know!

**How long should they stay?** That's up to you! It's helpful to give them an idea of how long the visit will be. Some international students may feel uncomfortable if they don't know how long is polite to stay. You might say, for example, "We'll pick you up at your room at noon and after we've had dinner together, we can show you around a bit. We'll bring you back to your room by 6:00 P.M." For a holiday, it's okay to have them stay longer if you are comfortable with that.

**What should we do together?** Whatever helps you enjoy your time together! Involve the students in whatever is traditional for your family. Since it is Thanksgiving they may enjoy watching a parade or football together. They might love to learn the rules of American football. You might look at photos or slides together, drive out to the countryside, play board games, or simply go for a walk and look around your neighborhood.



We encourage you to do whatever is normal for you and your family to do at Thanksgiving: if you normally pray before your meal, pray before your meal; if you normally sing together, sing together; if you normally go around the table, and say what you are thankful to God for, go around the table and thank God for what you are thankful for.... you get the idea!

### **Ideas of things to do:**

- Teach them how to toss a football around
- Go to a local high school football game before dinner

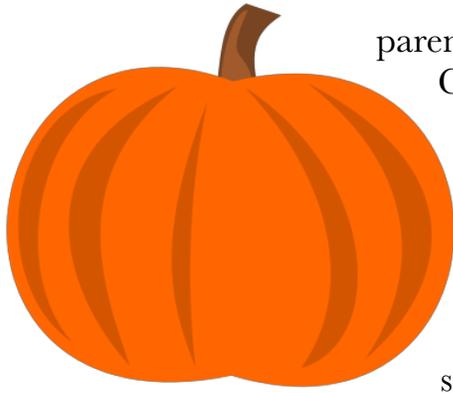
- Take them for a hike in a park
- Let them help you cook something
- Play a board game together
- Watch football on TV
- Play a fun ice breaker game with all your guests such as “Never Have I Ever,” or “Two Truths and a Lie”
- Decorate or pick out a Christmas tree: Yes, some families decorate for Christmas on Thanksgiving.
- Go on Google Earth and let them show you their hometown
- Carve a pumpkin together
- Play a day-long game, like “Don’t say the word turkey,” and have a prize for the winner
- Some families like to play music, sing, or read scripture on Thanksgiving
- Watch a classic movie... Like Elf, or Charlie Brown Thanksgiving... They may not understand American humor, but it will be a fun way to bond!

**What do students like to eat?** You should ask the students if they adhere to a particular diet, or if there are foods that they don't eat. Some international students don't eat meat, some will not eat pork. Usually chicken, turkey, fish, and eggs are "safe" to serve. You may certainly serve American food - the students will expect this - but don't be too surprised if they're not enthusiastic about your dish. It may take time to get used to American food, but for Thanksgiving they look forward to experiencing a traditional Thanksgiving meal. They like to learn about the food and how it is prepared. It's a cultural experience for them!

**Important note:** While many students do not eat pork, and some do not eat beef... we want to encourage you to make your regular Thanksgiving meal. Generally Thanksgiving meals have lots of variation anyway, with lots of different veggies, meat, etc. For example, some people cook stuffing with sausage; but you can very easily substitute turkey sausage instead of pork, and still make a delicious stuffing! If you are very nervous about what to prepare, you can simply talk to your student in advance, but don't stress over this!



**What can we talk about?** International students miss their families, and most will be happy to share with you about their family life (brothers and sisters,



parents, children, customs) and country. If you have a world atlas or Google Earth handy, they can point out where they live. You can ask them about their studies, hobbies, and religion, if they have one.

We always recommend for host families to take a little time and do some research about the countries that their students come from. You can find out tons of helpful info about your students' countries online. It always helps to read the news to know what any current events are that might be going on in their country.

A fun and easy resource to quickly learn some facts about other countries is the CIA Factbook. You can access it [here](#).

**What about helping out?** The students will want to feel more "at home" than feel like a guest. If they offer to bring a dish, help set the table or help clear and wash up, let them join you! They'll want to get firsthand knowledge of the way you and your family do things.

### **How do I pronounce their names?**

Ask them! They understand that their names are unusual for us to say. Some will tell you their "American name," feeling that it will be easier for you. If you make an effort to learn their real name, though, they'll appreciate it. You can ask how you should address them. International students may also not know exactly how to address you, whether to use your first name, Mr., Mrs., Dr., etc. They'll feel more at ease if you take the initiative to tell them how you'd like to be addressed. We have found it helpful to ask the student to spell their name for you in English. This is not offensive to ask, it shows that you really care about them, and want to pronounce their names correctly.

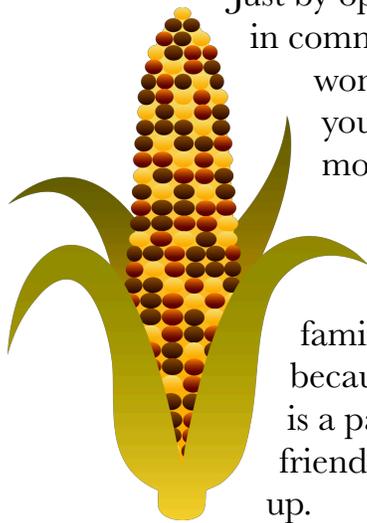


### **What if something "weird" happens?**

Life is full of the unexpected! Don't be surprised if your guests do something "strange." Our culture and customs here in the USA aren't necessarily "right," but

they are different than in many places. In Japan, for example, one removes their shoes before coming into the house to keep it clean. In Nigeria, the guest will not tell you when he wants to go home, but will wait until the host gives permission to leave. In some African countries, it's fine to show up as a guest with one or two extra people without telling the host beforehand! It might even happen that your guests don't show up, and don't call first to let you know, and in some cultures it's polite to ask other people how old they are. Don't be upset by such events, because sharing the love of Christ is important enough to get past some awkwardness! The most common “weird” thing that happens is that on occasion, students may cancel at the last minute. We apologize if this does happen. We work as hard as possible to prevent this from happening, but on occasion it does.

## **When do I start sharing the Gospel?**



Just by opening your home and serving them, you have taken the first step in communicating Christ's love. Most internationals who study in the US won't get this opportunity! As you pray for the students, and share your lives together, the Lord will give you opportunities to share more. You can relax, knowing that the Holy Spirit will do everything at the right time. This all falls under the category of “be yourself.” If Jesus is really the most important person in your life, then He will be invited to Thanksgiving with your family. We find in our family that it is natural to talk about God, because he is such an important part of our lives; we imagine that He is a part of your life as well, so as you and your new international friends talk about one another's lives, these things naturally will come up.

## **What about praying for the meal?**

Feel free to practice whatever family customs you have about prayer or reading a Scripture portion before or after the meal, explaining to the students that this is your custom. Say something simple such as, "It's our family custom to give thanks to God for the meal as we begin." Just be yourself! As you do this with tact and love, they'll respect your convictions, and it may lead to good conversation about spiritual things.

## **What's the next step?**

The last step is just like the first - be in prayer for your students!

If they are not already connected with the Bridges group on campus, you can give them the contact info ([internationalBridgesUB@gmail.com](mailto:internationalBridgesUB@gmail.com)) and let them know that there are many different opportunities for them to participate in events, like cultural events, Bible study, and trips and rides to church.

You have their contact information, so stay in touch if you've built a connection with them. Please consider inviting them to your home again on another occasion. Invite them to interesting local events in your community. They enjoy opportunities to get off campus and see more of the area.

We will also be following up with you to have you fill out a quick survey and let us know how it went. If you would like to continue to be involved with Bridges, please contact us at [internationalBridgesUB@gmail.com](mailto:internationalBridgesUB@gmail.com) and we will help find a way for you to continue to be involved.

