

“THINGS TO BE AWARE OF”

A LIST OF THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN HOSTING:

1. Try to live as normal a life as possible when your child is with you. Encourage your child to join in everyday activities and chores. Do not feel that you have to entertain them. You will feel more comfortable if you do your work together and don't wear yourself out trying to entertain them.
2. Some children may be shy and somewhat afraid. Be patient, relax and give them time to become acquainted with this new environment. Some have not been away from home before, especially 1,000 miles.
3. Don't let your child over-do telephoning while they are here. Make sure you have them call their parents or another relative to let them know that they arrived safely. Encourage your child to write home.
4. Not all the children will communicate with adults freely. Try not to question them about their home and their home life too much. When they trust you, they will tell you or your children about it.
5. Your child may be cold when we think it's comfortable, especially at night.
6. Most children do not know how to swim, nor will they probably bring a swimming suit. Many children will tell you that they can swim, even though they can't. They think that if they tell you they can swim, you will let them go swimming, but if you find out they can't swim, they will not be allowed to go. Enrolling them in a swimming class is a good idea.
7. Don't force your child to wash their hair often, as they normally do not have to wash it for two weeks or more, as they use more oil than we do. Absolutely do not cut their hair, and let them take care of braiding it themselves. Many times their mothers spend literally hours combing, braiding, and adding extensions to it. The very littlest girls may need some help.
8. Language and expressions many be different and difficult to understand. With patience and time, you will learn to understand what they are saying to you.
9. Don't force your child to drink milk. The body system of some blacks does not readily breakdown all components of milk.
10. Don't force your child to eat the portion sizes that your children may be used to eating, as at home, as some may not have as much to eat. Our food is also different than what they are used to eating. Some children will use a lot of sugar in everything. It is okay to limit the amount of sugar they use. Other children may heap their dinner plates to overflowing. You may want to dish up their plates for the first few meals, and then if they wish to eat more, allow them to do so. Some children will continue to eat until the food on the table is completely gone. Don't let them eat to the point of becoming ill just because they say they are hungry.
11. Some children may not be used to sitting down with the family to eat. Some children eat food we eat with a fork, with their hands. Don't let this bother you, but try to get them to use utensils.

12. The children should know that they are to check with host family adults before making plans of their own. Some children come with more discipline from home than others.
13. Let the children know what the “rules” in your home are. It may be necessary to be firm. Use your better judgement.
14. If any serious problems or complaints arise, call the area coordinator. Don’t wait until the visit is over to bring it up. You should expect some challenging situations when working with children. Do your best to be understanding and work out the challenge yourself, if possible. Remember that they are children.
15. Some children will experience homesickness. Be friendly and positive. Don’t dwell on their sadness. Some children show it and others don’t. Imagine yourself or your children in this situation and be understanding. If your child becomes extremely homesick, call your area coordinator. Do not get your child together with a sibling who is staying with a nearby family. This often backfires and creates two homesick children. Girls are much more likely to become homesick than boys are. Most of the homesickness occurs in the first 48 hours. Girls, ages 6-8 experience the most homesickness. If they are homesick, do not let them call home more than once every few days. Calling home, especially at bedtime, makes homesickness worse. Try letting them call home in the morning.
16. Warn of bike safety on hills and in traffic.
17. Many Mississippi children’s families consist of a mom, grandma, siblings, cousins and aunts or young uncles. Many boys lack good role models. As a result, some boys will take longer in accepting and relating to men, and yet others will constantly follow them around. Please have patience and understanding.
18. Some children ask for money. Politely discourage this, although they may earn some.
19. **PLEASE DO NOT GO OVERBOARD WITH GIFTS**—it’s unfair to those who get nothing. No pets may be sent back with the children. If you do have a gift, pack it in their suitcase, or please mail it later. Some children compare how much they get on the bus ride home.
20. If you are going to be gone for more than a few days, notify your coordinator as to where you can be reached in case of an emergency.
21. Please do not feel as if you need to send money back with your child on the bus trip home. If you do send money, 2 or 3 dollars will be enough, unless they earn more. They will not have any place or occasion to spend it on the way home. Pack any money they have deep inside their luggage.
22. For the return trip home, most buses will leave in the early evening. Make sure your child has had a healthy meal before getting on the bus. . Each family is also responsible for packing a nutritious “school type lunch”, including beverage, for your individual child to eat on the bus later in the evening.

23. PLEASE, PLEASE, do not let your child bring GUM or Candy that can melt on the bus! Some children throw it on the floor or put it between the seat, and it becomes a mess! NO GUM OR CANDY THAT CAN MELT.
24. Please limit your child to one additional piece of baggage, box, etc. for the return trip home. Please make sure all boxes fit under the bus seats (9 inches or less.) ***Please do not use plastic garbage bags for anything the child may be taking back with them. They **always** come apart!!
25. The children are covered by insurance all the time they are away from home. Also, if you have a Homeowner's Insurance Policy, it covers your guests too. Please notify your coordinator immediately in the event your child suffers an injury or becomes ill and requires treatment. Notify the coordinator after such treatment. Many children do not see a dentist on a regular basis. If you should discover your child is in need of dental care, ask your own dentist if he/she might be willing to donate their services. PSA's insurance does not cover dental care.
26. Mississippi families trust us a lot to allow their "babies" to travel 1,000 miles away from home; tears may be in the parents eyes as they board the bus to leave for Wisconsin.
27. Sometimes a child "takes" things that belong to others, such as toys, clothes, money, etc. Deal with the situation fairly and firmly, and with compassion.
28. Some children can benefit from special tutoring during the summer from someone in your family or another person.
29. Encourage your child to make use of the public library in your community, as rarely do they have this opportunity at home. Many rural Mississippi families have no children's books.
30. Some host families purchase for their child, school supplies for the coming year. This is appropriate, if you feel so inclined.
31. Some children still occasionally wet the bed at night. Feel free to use rubber sheets at the start of the stay, until you feel they are not needed.
32. It is not unusual for some children to suck their thumbs at times. Don't make an issue of this.
33. Occasionally children have large scars on their bodies from previous injuries. This is not unusual, as many times children hurt themselves while playing and the cuts are not treated by medical personnel. Rarely have the children been abused at home.
34. Many children have a fear of animals, especially dogs. It is not uncommon in rural areas for wild dogs to run in packs. Many parents and grandparents also have a fear of dogs relating back to the civil rights movements of the 60's when police often set their dogs loose during protest marches, etc. Let the Mississippi child become accustomed to animals slowly, even if they tell you they are not afraid of animals. The children often will not tell you of their fears because they think they will not be picked to come to Wisconsin if they do.
35. PSA coordinators try not to match a Mississippi child to a Wisconsin child, as this often puts too much pressure on the host child. Coordinators try to match a Mississippi child to a Wisconsin family.

36. The children come from an economic cross-section. Do not be offended if you are matched with a child that “seems as well off” as your own children. Let the exchange be a chance for your family to learn of the cultural differences.
37. It is not uncommon for a Mississippi child (or parent) to change their mind and decide not to come to Wisconsin the evening before or the morning the bus leaves Mississippi. If this occurs, the Mississippi coordinator or bus chaperone can sometimes find another child of similar age and sex. If not, we would try to get you a child on the next bus. You will be notified prior to the bus arrival if your child did not get on the bus and if a replacement was sent.
38. Some children will not want to leave when their stay is over. Remind them that their family misses them. Be understanding and let them know that you will write or call and that they can come back next summer.
39. Finally, remember the first thought shared here; treat your child just as you would treat your own child. Do not treat them “special,” as that is how problems arise. Do not make a special trip to Wisconsin Dells or Great America. If you do need discipline, be fair and understanding, but firm if necessary.

Yours is a special experience that awaits you and your family, to share your love, time and home with a Mississippi child. All who participate in this experience, both the children and you and your family, become more aware of the needs and concerns of others. It is quite likely that you will feel that you and your family got more out of hosting than the child.

Sometimes host families make arrangements to have the normal 12-19 day stay extended so that the experience many continue. If your family wishes to consider this, contact your coordinator to pursue the possibility. The decision will depend upon bus schedules and space, parental approval, as well as Wisconsin coordinator approval.

If you and your children find that you are interested in traveling to Mississippi on one of the bus trips to see your Mississippi child and their family, and serving as a volunteer bus driver or chaperone in the process, please contact Ann Neumann 262-626-2936(Home); 262-353-5719(Cell) or Patti Piaskowski 920-683-1495(Home); 920-901-1555(Cell) as soon as possible. We will make arrangements for you to stay with your Mississippi child’s family or Mississippi coordinator. Everyone involved with PSA activities is a volunteer; it has no paid staff, so summer bus drivers and chaperones are always **urgently needed.**