



Dear Child or Teenager,

We are delighted to give you our information pack for three week to three month exchanges in a foreign country. Take your time reading it. It is written so that a child as young as nine years old can understand it. If you are older, please forgive us for the somewhat simple style. You'll understand that children of all ages need to be able to make sense of it.

So you would like to go to another country for between three weeks and three months? You are brave, adventurous and you want to learn, to discover, and meet new people... you want to grow.

Adolesco, the name of our organization, is a Latin word that means "I'm growing."

"I'm growing" can mean many things. Children and teens are not only growing bigger in size, but also in intelligence and, more importantly, intelligence of the heart. For example, I'm growing when I start thinking about other people, and when I want to be helpful.

Our philosophy

An Adolesco exchange is not a part of ordinary life. It is an adventure that will help you grow in important ways. Adolesco favors the idea of family, education, and cross-cultural understanding. We like children and teens who are willing to take on a personal challenge. Adolesco hopes that parents want to make their children both happy and responsible. We are looking for children who respect their parents, freely and without fear.

We hope that this exchange will help you:

- ✓ Understand and respect other cultures that are different from your own.
- ✓ Become more responsible for your own life.
- ✓ Recognize that other people need you and you can help make them happy.
- ✓ Be respectful and to understand that it is good to help other people.
- ✓ Recognize that it is better to give than to receive.
- ✓ Understand it is better to love than to criticize or poke fun.

You are growing up all the time; you can think by yourself and for yourself and form your own idea as to what is good or bad. If you need some help, ask an adult you trust. Often this is your parents, but it could be a reliable friend. Remember that you can find within yourself the strength that will lead you to become an independent person and to the life that you would like.

Why say all this to children and teenagers who simply want go abroad? Because Adolesco is no ordinary exchange organization. Adolesco means "I'm growing" and we want to help you grow in many ways, thanks to your experience of living in a different country.

Rewards of an Adolesco exchange:

Personal benefits:

- ✓ With a bit of luck, you will have a friend for the rest of your life.
- ✓ You will have a family in another country you can visit.
- ✓ Your parents can also become friends with the foreign family.
- ✓ After your Adolesco exchange you can keep in touch with your foreign family by telephone, email, Skype, letters, or postcards.
- ✓ You learn that life is full of differences. In your foreign family things are not better or worse, they are just different.
- ✓ You learn to think of others and see life through their eyes.
- ✓ You will become more adventurous, confident, and open to others

Linguistic benefits:

Thanks to your few weeks abroad, especially if you make up your mind to talk a lot (but not in English!) and if you don't mind making mistakes to begin with, you will be surprised by your new language ability.

Even you don't know a single word of the foreign language, you will learn very quickly. By the end of 4 weeks you will understand a lot. After 7 weeks you will already speak well.

If you have already taken some classes in French, German or Spanish at school, you know that it is not always easy to learn a language at school. Neither you nor your teacher is to blame for this. It is simply that only a few lessons a week makes it difficult to improve.

If, however, you are constantly surrounded by people speaking a new language, you will quickly begin to think in the foreign language. You will enjoy learning and playing with this new language.

When you return home, you will be much better than the others in your class at French, Spanish, or German and you'll find it easier to learn a second foreign language.

As you progress further in school you will not say, "Too bad I don't know French (or Spanish or German)." Instead, when you are looking for a job, your experience abroad, your knowledge of another language, and your confidence could make all the difference.

Choice of country:

For Adolesco, it is not only the language side, but the human side of the exchange that is important. French, Spanish and German are all helpful languages to know. Adolesco believes the choice of language is not the most important consideration. What counts above all is developing a positive cross-cultural relationship.

Above all, it is your relationship with other people that counts and knowing that you have a second family in another country that will always be ready to welcome you.

Where to go? If you can be flexible with your choice of language, you leave the door open for us to find the best possible partner for you. If you are ready to go to any one of the countries we work with, there is every chance we will find a good exchange for you. Talk about what you want with your parents.

Our advice to you:

If you're in primary school and have not learned a single word of any foreign language: Great! You will learn and have a wonderful experience wherever you decide to go.

If you are in secondary school and are learning French, of course you can go to France. But it would also be a good idea to try something you aren't doing at school. This way, you will know three languages, and as you will certainly make return visits to Spain or Germany, you will be able to improve the new language. There is also nothing to stop you from doing a second or even a third Adolesco exchange to learn additional languages!

Above all, be open-minded about the choice of country and language. Give yourself the best chance.

Giving and receiving:

An Adolesco exchange is an exchange where you give and receive.

You give when your foreign brother/sister is at your home. You give and you share. You give your time; you share your toys, your games, your activities, your friends, and even your brothers and sisters and your parents. You make sure that your exchange partner is happy in your home, in your country.

It is possible that at the beginning of your foreign sibling's stay, your parents will spend a lot of time with them because they need a lot of help, and you might feel jealous. Talk about it with your parents.

Have you thought about when you welcome?

Do you think that you will be able to make your partner feel really welcome?

Will they be happy in your home?

Will you be happy for your exchange partner to make friends of their own?

Will you include them in your group of friends?

Will you stick up for them when troublemakers come and pester them?

Will you make time for them?

Will you know how to respect the fact that they are different?

It is up to you. You are RESPONSIBLE for the decisions you make.

When you are in the other country:

It is an adventure, but leaving your home and living somewhere new is not always easy. All your habits will change – the parents, siblings, house, friends, food, lifestyle, and schedules will all be different and new. The adventure is to discover and enjoy the difference. The family will help you to be happy and to get used to your new family and new language.

Who can apply?

Any child (eight or older) or teenager who understands our way of thinking, and wants to go abroad, make friends, and learn another language. You also must be ready to welcome a child or teen your age into your home. We very occasionally do boy/girl exchanges. It is up to you to decide if that is something you would not mind.

Who do we accept? Kind, open, smiling, sharing children and teens. Our exchanges are for children who deserve them. It is not a problem for us to refuse a selfish, grumpy child or teenager.

This wonderful human and linguistic adventure of ours is for children and teenagers who understand life as we try to describe it in these pages. If you see life in terms of physical and verbal conflict, if you want to be given everything but give very little in return, if you are fed up with your parents, teachers and adults in general, then you need to wait until you understand life differently before joining us.

What are the rules?

Self-respect:

Do not hurt yourself; don't do what is wrong and then expect to be happy.

No smoking.

No drinking.

Respecting others:

Respect your host parents and siblings.

Respect your exchange partner and friends.

Respect your teachers in both countries.

Respect your classmates and the other pupils at school.

Remain positive, be happy. You are important and must grow well. Try to radiate happiness around yourself. You must surely know children and teenagers who are really nice to know! Be one of them, or become one of them.

Respect the environment:

Love and respect our planet wherever you are. You should respect your daily environment in your new surroundings as they too belong to you even if it is not your own country.

Avoid these pitfalls so you have a successful exchange:

- ✘ Computers/laptops/tablets
- ✘ The internet (email, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- ✘ Television (except with your international family in their language)
- ✘ Your cell phone

Please accept our advice as far as all these “isolating devices” are concerned. You must understand that, while these devices are fantastic and can offer so much, they will not help you to have a successful exchange. Despite our advice, a 16-year old girl was sent home early from an exchange this year because she took her laptop with her and spent most of her time online, communicating with her friends from home. She did not engage with the people around her so her stay was not successful.

We have been sending children abroad since 1978 and have a pretty good idea of what works and what doesn't. At Adolesco, we want you to form a lifelong friendship and we also want you to make progress in the foreign language. Verbal communication is necessary for both of those ends. Using these devices will make meeting these goals harder, if not impossible.

Here's why: if you are spending time on the internet, texting your friends at home, or emailing your parents every day, you won't be participating in your “real” life abroad and you'll be cut off from those around you. We want you to take part in life. Your new family wants to get to know you and spend time with you. Don't just stay in your bedroom. You must talk to the children and parents and join in their activities. Your host family wants to have real contact with the children and teenagers that they welcome into their home.

You will not be allowed to take your cellphone abroad with you. This may sound strange to you but we need you trust in our expertise. We'll talk more about this at the informational meeting. If necessary, your host family will lend you a phone. Of course, if the children in your host family do not have mobile phones you will not have one either.

You will not be allowed to phone or email your friends or family back home whenever you like, unless there is an important reason. Your parents will phone you once a week. Speaking your native language makes immersion language learning much more difficult, as well as increasing homesickness. Try to be fully present where you are.

Concerning Facebook, Twitter, etc.

If you do use social media during your exchange, Adolesco asks that you never write anything negative or criticize anyone around you (family, friends, teachers, etc.). Instead, use it to broadcast the positive aspects of your experience.

One exception: if you are genuinely perfect (as in, you don't have a single fault) then and only then are you allowed to criticize others. Unfortunately, we have had to send children home early after they made inappropriate comments on Facebook.

Some tips for your life in the other country:

Here is some good advice from Mathilde: she is 14 and has already been abroad.

"You must make the most of your exchange, it goes too quickly. Making the most of it means being ready to grasp every opportunity to try something new. For example, if the family suggests going somewhere, say "yes" with a big smile! Your "brother" wants to show you a new game, go and see what it is all about. The mother has cooked a dish that you have never tried, try it!

It can be fun to discover new things and then later on to remember all these firsts. In fact, you could find yourself enjoying new experiences for the first time every day. Be curious about everything and smile! Keep your eyes and ears wide open so that you can understand how people live in another country!"

Are you ready to go?

Maybe it was your idea to go to another country and you have spoken to your parents about it to try and get them to agree. But maybe it is your parents who are pushing you to go and you don't know how to say no. You don't know how to say to them "No, I don't want to go. I want to stay at home." If this is the case, then write us a letter like this:

"Dear Adolesco, I don't want to go to another country. I want to stay at home but I don't know how to tell my parents; they'll be upset with me." Sign your letter, put it in an envelope (with a first-class or 'forever' stamp on it) and send it to the North American Adolesco representative:

Kristin Bigelow
9040 Stinson Beach Way
Elk Grove, CA 95758

Or email us at usa@adolesco.org.

We promise not to tell your parents about your letter or email, but we will find a reason not to send you. We will say that we could not find the right family for you, or some other reason.

If you aren't sure whether you want to go or not, come to our informational meeting before sending your letter. Maybe you'll find the meeting interesting and change your mind.

Conclusion:

We set up Adolesco so that children could have friends in another country who speak a different language. The biggest goal is to make a friend for life. It is quite likely that the two sets of parents will also become friends. The second goal is to learn a new language or, if you already have some knowledge of the language, to improve this language.

We give children and teens a chance for a great adventure. However, we are all different and do not all have the same priorities.

Do not throw yourself into this without thinking.

Is this really for you? If you are shy and quiet, if you feel that you would be unable to talk to your foreign partner, their parents, or friends because of your shyness, do not begin this adventure as it would make the people you would be living alongside every day unhappy.

It is a very demanding experience: you will need to make a lot of effort; you will be actively responsible for your life, a good life that will bring happiness to others and of course to yourself.

Welcome to your new adventure!

With our very best wishes,

The Adolesco Team