



Welcome to AMIS!

We want to extend a warm welcome and thank you for joining AMIS in our mission to WELCOME and CONNECT International Students and Scholars to FRIENDS (you!) in the Greater Atlanta Area through the Amigo Friendship Partners program. Your friendship and hospitality will make a difference in the lives of young global leaders as you welcome them to Atlanta and support them in their adjustment to living in a new country and culture.

It is our hope that the information in this packet will be helpful in understanding the role and responsibilities of being an Amigo Friend to an international student. We want to make sure you have all the support you need to have a positive experience as an AMIS volunteer, so please don't hesitate to contact us (470-851-1248) if you have any questions.

Rev. Irene Wong
Executive Director
irene@amis-inc.org

Susan Rembert
Program Administrator
susan@amis-inc.org

Checklist for NEW Amigo Friendship Partner Volunteers

- Sign up at amis-inc.org/amigovolunteer
- New volunteers - please complete a background check. An e-mail will be sent to you from Sterling Volunteers with a link to register for a background check. Having a background check provides assurance to the university, the students, and AMIS that we are committed to the welfare of the students and scholars in our programs. AMIS will pay for the background check, but you will be invited to make a donation toward the cost (which is optional). Returning volunteers – we will be in touch about this.
- Read through this Amigo Volunteer Guide.
- Schedule a Zoom conference call with Rev. Irene Wong and/or Susan Rembert for a 30-minute orientation session.
- Receive an introductory e-mail to you and your Amigo Student Friend from susan@amis-inc.org. (Should you not receive this within 10 days of signing up and registering for your background check, please let us know.)
- Reach out by e-mail to your Amigo Student Friend (see attached suggestions).
- Meet with your Amigo Student Friend! (PLEASE contact the office if you do not hear back from your student within 7 days).

Our Mission Statement

Atlanta Ministry with International Students (AMIS) promotes cultural understanding through friendship and hospitality with international students in the Greater Atlanta area.

Our Values

- AMIS is a Christian-based organization that respects the faith and cultural traditions of all who participate with us.
- Our purpose is to "welcome the stranger," and we do not include religious messaging promoting a particular faith as part of our programs. It's fine for volunteers to be themselves and open about their faith, but we ask that volunteers do not proselytize (which means do not apply pressure on students to convert). Invitations to church events are fine, as long the students know what to expect and they are respectfully allowed to decline.
- As members of NAFSA (National Association of International Educators), we are guided by and adhere to NAFSA's Statement of Ethical Principles. For more info see: <https://www.nafsa.org/about-us/about-nafsa/nafsas-statement-ethical-principles>



Suggestions for a First E-mail to Your Amigo Student Friend

You and your Amigo Student Friend will receive an introduction e-mail connecting you from the AMIS office. After you receive this e-mail, please follow up with an email to your student. Please let Susan, our Program Administrator, know (susan@amis-inc.org) if you DON'T receive an e-mail or phone reply from your international student within a week of your initial contact attempt. The Program Administrator will then try to contact the student.

Subject: Amigo Friendship Program

[Attach a digital photo of yourself or your family.]

Dear _____,

AMIS provided me with your e-mail and phone contact information. We are/I am your American family/ friend in this program.

[Provide some information about you and or your family (spouse, children, job, hobbies, where you live, etc.) and your phone number.]

[Suggest a time to get together; weekends usually work best for students. If possible, offer 2-3 possible dates or events to get together with your student.]

I am/We are looking forward to meeting you,

A day before your meeting, please reach out to the student to confirm the meeting place and time by email, phone or text.

Ideas for getting together with your Amigo Student Friend:

- 1) Meet for coffee or breakfast
- 2) Meet for a meal in a restaurant (please inquire about dietary preferences beforehand)
- 3) Plan a group meal in your home (always have at least 3 people present)
- 4) Join AMIS's monthly events (amis-inc.org/events)
- 5) Attend school, community or church programs/plays
- 6) Participate in seasonal or holiday events, such as Halloween parties, Easter Egg hunts, Christmas lights and/or parties
- 7) Participate in group gatherings such as potlucks or game nights
- 8) Attend a sports event (professional, school, university)

Regional Amigo gatherings

Some Amigo Friends may like to join with other nearby volunteers for group gatherings in a home or go together to a local event. It helps to share the load if one volunteer hosts and others help prepare the food and/or transport students. The AMIS office will try to coordinate these optional regional gatherings. Let us know if you might be interested.



General Information:

Considerations for the first visit:

- 1) For the first meeting, it is usually a good idea to meet in a public place near your student's college/university or place of residence. A neutral location may alleviate the anxiety of meeting a stranger (who will become a friend). However, home visits may be more convenient for families with children and for those who enjoy home hospitality. If you are holding a group gathering in your home, please make sure there are always at least 3 people present, and you may suggest that your student invite a friend. Our office is happy to connect you with other volunteers who might like to share hosting a group gathering with you.
- 2) Please give your contact information to the student and make sure you have their correct information. You may also tell them the names of your family members.
- 3) When you meet, practice pronouncing their name correctly. Names can be difficult, but it will please them greatly to have friends who care enough to learn their name.
- 4) Many international students do not have a car, so they will often need transportation if going to your home or to get to an AMIS event. Please offer to pick them up, or ask if they are willing to use MARTA, or Lyft/Uber.
- 5) Extend invitations to friends of your student. This can be fun for all and can also make the student feel more comfortable, having someone they know with them.
- 6) If you are hosting in your home, provide students with a drink or refreshments when they arrive. It will make them feel more welcomed as it is the custom in many countries. Sometimes offers of refreshments or extra servings at a meal might need to be made several times as it might be considered impolite in their culture to accept the first or second time.
- 7) It can be helpful to make arrangements for a future visit while the students are with you. This is an important act in many cultures and will ensure the students of your acceptance of them. Be mindful of their schedules, holidays, and exam times, and don't forget to follow-up with a text or e-mail. Consider making your next gathering an AMIS event, like the MLK tour, the Welcome Reception, or a sports event.
- 8) Because customs vary among cultures, you should be the one to initiate the end of a particular visit. Let the students know in advance about how long the visit will last. When it is time to say goodbye, let them know you have enjoyed their visit and make arrangements for the next time you will meet.
- 9) Always follow-up verbal communication with a text or e-mail to serve both as a reminder and a clarification if anything was misunderstood.

Language and Conversation:

- 1) Most of our Amigo undergraduate and graduate students have high English ability and will have passed a minimum level of language ability to be a student in their major. If you are matched with an ESL student (meaning they are here to study English), their English ability may be lower, but they are eager to improve their language through practice.
- 2) Speak slowly and enunciate your words. You may need to adjust your pace as you sense their level of comprehension. Volume does NOT help. Southerners are known for speaking fast and you may need to explain jokes, slang, and idioms.
- 3) Ask questions. Students from other cultures may not be used to the extroverted American way of communicating and you asking open-ended questions about where they are from, about their family background, experiences, etc. will encourage them in their conversations with you.



- 4) Learn greetings in your student's language. It can be fun for the whole family to learn. "Hello", "Goodbye", and "Thank you" are easy places to start.
- 5) Encourage students to talk about themselves, their family, and their country. You will be amazed at what you will learn.
- 6) Discussions of religion and politics should be avoided unless initiated by the students. Even then the host should tread lightly and respectfully.

Additional ideas:

- 1) Advice on where to shop for specific items is always helpful. There are many discount stores where students can get what they need without paying high prices.
- 2) Ask your student about their birthday. Chances are, it will not be celebrated unless you are interested enough to care. If you give a gift, please make it an inexpensive one as it may place a burden on them to feel as if they must reciprocate. Customs in many foreign countries require that when a gift is received, a gift must be given in return. Let students know that their friendship is the best gift they can give to you.
- 3) If you are invited, your presence at the student's graduation ceremony will be very meaningful to them. Also, any photographs will be valuable to their family, especially if they are unable to attend.

In regards to food:

- 1) It is a good idea to ask about dietary restrictions when planning to eat with a student.
- 2) Muslims will not eat pork or ham, and as a rule, will not take alcoholic beverages. Hindus will not eat beef and in many cases are vegetarians. Strict vegetarians eat no animal fats or shortenings. These items are not used in cooking. Jews are governed by "kosher" rules prohibiting the eating of pork or ham. It is helpful to explain that Southern cooking often incorporates meat into vegetables, so alert them that the "green beans" may be cooked with ham for example.
- 3) Lamb, fish, and chicken are usually acceptable to many of the Eastern Hemisphere peoples (when in doubt, buy Halal)
- 4) Alcoholic beverages are used sparingly in many countries.
- 5) Fruit, cheese, or light desserts are preferred by many international visitors.
- 6) If serving alcoholic beverages to students and guests of legal age, remember that soft drinks, fruit juices or bottled water should also be made available.
- 7) Keep food offered at meals simple and provide a choice of vegetables and fruits (cooked or raw, but not cooked in animal fats). Green salads with tomatoes and cucumbers are always reliable.
- 8) Buffet meals are good; it gives the student the option of taking or leaving food with little embarrassment.
- 9) Students may be interested in preparing foods, perhaps a national dish, in your kitchen. Your assistance in locating the ingredients for the meal may be needed or you may want to shop together at an international market.
- 10) Expressions of pleasure over a meal differ among various cultures. Do not be offended if your guests slurp their soup. Such gestures indicate they are enjoying the meal.

*Sections adapted from "International Friendship Guide" by International Student and Scholar Services, University of Houston.

What Students May Expect from an Amigo Friendship Partner

What Students May Expect	What the Amigo Friendship Partner Can Do
1. Genuine interest in them as individuals such as their schoolwork, majors, university life, health, status and well-being of their family back home. -Correct pronunciation of their names.	-Ask lots of questions. -Call, email or visit if they've been sick. -Ask to see photos, inquire about ongoing concerns. -Don't give them a new (English) name unless they ask.
2. Sense of family: -Being together for major holidays -Inclusion in extended family	-Invite them for Thanksgiving, Christmas, birthdays (yours or theirs) -Share news of other family members -Tell about each other's family. Show pictures. Write down names to help you remember.
3. Cultural curiosity: -Current events, politics -Special celebrations/holiday -Customs -Geography	-Keep up with the news and discuss it -Research their country, holidays and customs -Go online or look at a map (Google Earth is a great tool)
4. Tolerance and flexibility -Openness to different ways to doing and thinking -Lack of pre-judgment, ethnocentrism, xenophobia	-Ask "how", not "why" questions -Don't try to show America as #1
5. Friendliness -Warmth -Attentiveness -Personal time	-Remember what they tell you -Give time, even if on the phone or short visits
6. Advice in understanding the American system -Postal system, banking, where and how to shop, social customs, driver's license, weddings	
7. Some interesting activities together -Museums, movies, theater, sports, area attractions, concerts, cultural events	-Activities don't have to be expensive or distant. Take them along when your family goes to these. -Internationals can pay for any entrance fees.
8. Patience	-Give them time to explain, without second guessing them. Accommodate a different sense of time.

*Adapted from information by International Student and Scholar Services, The University of Houston.

Finally, keep in touch with the AMIS Office:

- Please send Susan (susan@amis-inc.org) a short email after you've had your first meeting with your Amigo student to let us know that you have met in person.
- Take pictures of you and your Amigo when you do fun things and email them to us so we can share the wonderful things going on with our Amigo Friendship Partners!
- If you have any great stories of international friendships or quotes that are worth sharing, please tell them to us!
- In the Spring (early May), we will send out an online survey asking for your feedback on your experience in the Amigo program. Please fill it out so we can continue to improve the experience for students and volunteers.