What Family and Friends Can Do

1. **Show interest.** Returnees very much need to share their experiences with you. There is so much to process and telling a few stories may not feel adequate to your student. Set aside time for a few quiet conversations, to hear the stories behind the some of the pictures or enjoy a meal from their program site.

   All the focus on their time overseas may leave little room for sharing the changes you have experienced on the home-front. At some point, most travelers realize they need to hear your stories in order to feel at home again.

2. **Don’t be offended** when they criticize their home culture or home country and constantly compare it unfavorably with their overseas post. Their time away has given them a new way of looking at their home-town, campus or country. It may take several weeks, but most travelers develop a more balanced perspective on both countries. So smile and offer another helping of their favorite ice cream (which, by the way, was not available abroad).

3. **Remind your student that it is normal for the return home to feel uncomfortable, strange or even difficult.** It is not unusual for returnees to feel frustrated, misunderstood, bored or “home sick” for their host country. You may not understand everything they are going through, but if you can appreciate that re-adjusting to life in the U.S. is a complicated process, that appreciation may help ease some of the anxiety your student feels.

4. **Don’t pressure them to visit all the time.** Parents and grandparents take note; give your loved ones some breathing room. In addition to sorting out their feelings about being home, your student is probably addressing expectations of teachers, employers and new friends they made overseas. A little understanding goes a long way.

5. **Don’t spring family responsibilities and challenges** on them right away. No doubt the absence of your student created a void for your family and you’ve been looking forward to closing that gap. However, travelers need time to put their journey in perspective. Give them a few weeks to regain their balance.

6. **Above all, be patient.** As they re-adjust, you may find your student's behavior irritating, insensitive, disturbing or alarming. Try to remember that you are learning about changes in your traveler while they are getting re-acquainted at home. Both processes will take some time-don’t be too hard on yourself or your student.


Rev. Nov 2014