

Communication

You've probably heard this over and over: the importance of good communication. This applies to the 4-H Japan exchange, too.

Notice that this says EXCHANGE. Sometimes people refer to this as a "trip" to Japan. While you will be sightseeing with your host family, this is so much more than a trip. You and your host family are exchanging cultural information. This requires communication. But what if you don't speak Japanese, or don't speak it as well as you wish? How can you communicate? Some people become shy and stop talking. It's a strong temptation and it can happen to anyone. Don't let it happen to you.

Use English. Your host family and new friends know more English than they use and they want to learn more by listening to you. Try the few Japanese words you know. Learn more by using your dictionary and phrase book and by asking your host friend. If you can speak Japanese, please still use some English, as your hosts and friends would like to practice conversation with someone who is a native English speaker.

Keep in mind that a person learning English will understand you better if you speak clearly, and use "standard English", without slang. When you hear your host family use an English word, you will know that they know that word and you can use it when you talk with one another.

Use drawings and pantomime, such as pretending that you are drinking something. Keep in mind that some of the hand gestures we use in the USA don't mean the same in Japan. The way we might wave "bye-bye" can mean "come here" in Japan.

Re-read the Travel Tips email explaining 4-H. When people see your 4-H t-shirt in airports, on the planes, or out walking in Japan, they might ask you why you are there. When they see the clover, they may even tell you about their own experiences with 4-H. Some will not know that 4-H now has a program for international friendship and global understanding and you can tell them about it.

Once you have the address of your host family, make sure that you write to them right away using "snail mail" at least once before you travel. Tell them more about yourself and send photos if you wish. You might want to ask

them if you should bring any special clothing or other items for any activities that they are planning. Or if there is anything in particular that they would like to know about Alaska.

Here is how you should address your letter:

Name (last name first): example--Murakami Hirofumi

House/apartment address: examples---3-8-3 Narusegaoka or 105 Kajigaya
1384-1 or 3-7 Kamisugi 5 Chome or 6-18-36 Oizumigakuen-cho or
Benibana Apartment 231 24-28 Shirahatamukai-sho or 1-1-F 2001
Togamidai

Part of city: example--Nerima-ku

City: example--Sendai-shi

Prefecture: example--Miyagi-ken or Chiba-ken or Tokyo

Postal Code: example--356-0052

Country: Japan

After you send the initial letter by mail, you are welcome to communicate by email if your host family uses email. Some host families only email on their cell phones and must pay for the data, so the best way to find out if they can easily email is to send them your email address in your letter and invite them to email you, if they wish.

While you are in Japan, you are expected to do some writing, too.

1. During your first week in Japan you **MUST** write a letter or postcard home to your family. It will take a week for the letter to arrive, and they want to hear from you.
2. During the Tokyo orientation, you will be given items to mail to the chaperone and to Labo staff during the exchange. Please fill them out and give them to your host family to mail.
3. Write in your journal every day. Please don't put it off. Delegates who don't write really regret it later.

4. Before you leave your host family, write a Thank You note to them and leave it on your pillow. After you get home, write another letter. Write another one in December. Of course, you are welcome to write or email more often!

When you are in Japan, there is an organized "chain of communication". This is to keep communication clear and keep everyone informed. If USA 4-H or your Alaskan family wants to get a message to you quickly, or if you or Labo has a message for your family in Alaska (such as a delayed flight), they will use this communication chain. You and your host family will contact the chaperone and Labo Staff in Japan, who will contact 4-H staff in the USA (who are on-call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week), who will contact Alaska 4-H staff, who will contact your family. A copy of this "chain" is in your delegate handbook. Please look at it and make sure that you and your family follow the chain. When you arrive in Japan, Alaska 4-H will be notified and will let your family know that you are now with your host.

Please remember that you are only to use your cell phone, if you bring one, while you are in the USA and not in Japan. The USA/Japan exchange discourages use of email and Facebook. Sitting at a computer will cause you to think about home and to miss the Japan experience around you. Try to only write "snail" mail letters to your family and friends. Everyone likes to get mail! If you must communicate electronically, try to use the computer just once a week. Be sure and remember to write your friends' and family's mailing addresses in your journal now, so you will have them in Japan.

When you return, you will be communicating your Japan experiences to others. You can do presentations, a PowerPoint, teach/demonstrate something you have learned, write an article, or something else you wish to do. Your journal will make this easier.

In Japan, as in some of our Alaskan cultures, people don't always speak in a direct manner. For example, if your host mother wants you to change your clothes, she might not come out and tell you that you need to change your clothes. She might ask you if you want to change your clothes. If you and your host siblings are running around and making too much noise, she might not like it but won't necessarily come right out and tell you to stop.

This can be tricky for some Americans, because we are used to more direct speech and to people telling us what they think. So, here are some tips for

you. If someone repeats themselves, such as asking you several times if you want to do something, like take a bath or change your clothes, they may be actually requesting that you do it.

But even if they ask only once, how can you make sure that you understand? You can ask a question that would have YES for an answer, such as "Should I change my clothes?" or "Should we stop running now?", instead of asking, "Are these clothes okay?", which might have a NO answer. If your new friends don't really care if you change your clothes, they can say, "It's not a problem" or "It's okay.", which are still positive things to say. If they really do think that you need to dress differently for where they are taking you, now they can tell you by saying YES instead of NO.

You can also ask a question which can't be answered by a YES or NO, such as "What should I wear today?" or "What should I do now?".