

HOSTING A NEW FAMILY

Being the first congregation to host a new family has its own unique challenges. When a new family gets to the congregation it can be somewhat shocking. It is one thing to explain our model to a family but they may not actually understand what it means to stay at the host site until they arrive.

Imagine what they are feeling. Within a brief period of time, the world as they knew it has totally changed. They are trying to hold it together and still respond to the needs of their children. People are telling them when they are going to eat and what will be for dinner. There are all kinds of guidelines to learn. They lose their privacy and are away from their support system. Then, throw in trying to get along with families that are already in the program and have relationships with the volunteers.

How you interact with the family on their first night can have a strong impact on them and help them get a good start to their return to independent living. The Network Director will make every effort not to start a family on a Friday. On the night that a new family starts, the Host Coordinator or someone they designate should be there to greet the new family and orient them to the Host Site. Show them their room, bathroom, smoking area and emergency exits. Let them know what the kitchen routine is and what areas of the site they and their children can be in. Tell them what time they should be ready for the van the next morning. People respond better when they hear positive language. For example, telling them where they can be rather than pointing out places that are not allowed.

Each family is different. Some families may prefer to go to their room after dinner. Some may be more sociable. The first few nights, they may be somewhat seclusive until they are feeling more comfortable. Don't assume they want help unpacking. You may want to offer an activity to the children while the parent gets settled in but be respectful that the parent may be wary of these 'strangers' around.

Sometimes families are defensive and difficult to get along with. This style may have contributed to why they lost their housing to begin with. If conflict arises, try to stay calm. Tell them what you expect from them. Remind them of the guidelines and then walk away. Do not engage in arguments with them. If the guest does not become compliant, call the Network Director immediately.

Other issues they tend to arise with a new family:

- Competition arises between the families
- "Old" families critique the "new" family
- The children do not play well together
- Parents don't realize they need to be with their children at all times
- "Old" families do not always communicate accurate information to the "new" family

If you have any concerns when you start a new family, you should contact the Network Director immediately so issues can be resolved and not snowball. Remember-you are not 'telling' on the family--- you are helping them make different choices that will lend itself to successfully returning to sustainable independence.