

Ohio 4-H Japanese Labo Exchange Program HOST FAMILY FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Could you explain this exchange program with Japan? What is Labo?

- ❑ Labo is a youth organization in Japan dedicated to cultural and language learning. Its name comes from an abbreviation of the words “language laboratory.”
- ❑ The group was founded in 1972 to promote cross-cultural awareness. More of its history can be found in the Host Family Handbook.
- ❑ Ohio has participated since 1980. Ohio 4-H families have hosted over 3,800 Japanese and over 250 Ohio 4-H’ers have gone to Japan.
- ❑ Each year more than 100 participants from Japan will come to Ohio and about 15 Ohio 4-H’ers travel to Japan on “odd” years.

2. We’ve received a letter from our host son/daughter from Japan. It was written in very good English. Does that mean he/she will speak English well?

- ❑ Few of the Japanese youth speak more than rudimentary English, and some speak poorly, but you *can* communicate. As the 3.5 weeks passes, their skills will increase.
- ❑ A well-written letter may have been done with the help of a language tutor and/or dictionary.
- ❑ We’d like for families to anticipate the challenge of the youth speaking no English.
- ❑ Try practicing some Japanese phrases. This will make the youth feel more at ease.

3. In what ways have past host families communicated?

- ❑ Using smiles, sign language, drawing pictures, pointing at objects.
- ❑ Speaking slowly, clearly (not more loudly).
- ❑ Repeating sentences or words, using only necessary words.
- ❑ Youth bring electronic translators with them and helpful translating books are provided to Host Families.

4. Our guest is due to arrive in one week. What should our family be doing?

- ❑ Have space for exchangee cleared out; their own bedroom is not necessary; at least a drawer, someplace to unpack and call their own. This is important to make the person feel at home.
- ❑ Your family should be willing to open their home and hearts to the youth or adult, and to spend time with them.
- ❑ We want them to feel like a part of the family. Treat them the same as your own children, with the same rules and privileges. (Example: raiding the refrigerator.)



5. If we have difficulties communicating with the Japanese youth, how will we know if they are enjoying themselves?

- ❑ You may not be able to tell if the Japanese are enjoying themselves, since they do not show emotion in the same way most Americans do.
- ❑ Be patient. As you become familiar and comfortable with each other, you will be able to understand each other.
- ❑ Try to notice changes in behavior (homesickness or spending too much time alone).
- ❑ They will need to spend some time alone each day to write in diaries or to adjust to this new style of living.
- ❑ Many families report never being sure if their Japanese child was happy until the Japanese parents wrote after their child returned home.
- ❑ Accept and learn to appreciate that different cultures express emotions differently and not everyone is as demonstrative as Americans.
- ❑ If you are very concerned, you may contact your ICC or the state office, who will ask a chaperone to check on the child.

6. Have families ever had problems with food?

- ❑ Most Japanese youth like American foods, and are familiar with McDonald's, KFC, and other fast food chains popular in Japan.
- ❑ Children everywhere may have certain foods they dislike.
- ❑ There are cultural differences in the ways we prepare and eat food. Families are encouraged to pursue a healthful diet while the exchangeees are here Heavy on fruits, vegetables, fish, chicken and rice ... Less emphasis on fast-food and heavily-fried foods.

7. Are there specific differences in American and Japanese culture that we need to know?

- ❑ Yes ~ they will be explained at the Host Family Orientation and in Handbooks.
- ❑ Beds (used to having them on floor, don't use top bunk); bathing habits (demonstrate use of showers); Japanese do laundry more frequently; eating (forks vs. chopsticks); personal safety and security of possessions; drive on the right side.

8. Our host child has written that he/she wants to visit Disney World. That is not possible for us, what can we do?

- ❑ Explain the great distances involved; Japanese youth frequently do not understand this.
- ❑ It will be explained to them during their orientation at OSU that such travel is impossible.
- ❑ The homestay is to be a family experience, not sightseeing.
- ❑ Many place of interest in Ohio, close by.

9. Our Labo child has developed a rash, but does not seem concerned. What should we do?

- ❑ Each child has medical information/authorization sheet as well as insurance card & info.
- ❑ Act as parent, treat as you would your own child.
- ❑ Try to communicate.
- ❑ Get necessary medical help and/or call your ICC or the State Office (Mary Lynn)
- ❑ Medical Insurance is excellent so never hesitate to get help.

10. Do the Japanese youth enjoy visiting each other during the stay?

- ❑ A get-together is fine (families enjoy them), but emphasis is placed on learning English and bonding with one's host family, not spending too much time with the other Japanese. County-wide picnics can be fun and you'll be informed of such events.
- ❑ Sometimes Japanese youth, just like American children, do not get along with each other. Do not be surprised if the Japanese in your county prefer not to visit. They want their time in America to be their special time with you. Japanese boys and girls are especially shy around each other at this age.

11. Past host families have warned us that the Japanese give many gifts. Do they expect expensive gifts from us?

- ❑ Gift-giving is part of Japanese culture. There is no necessity to reciprocate, although you may give as sincerely as you wish.
- ❑ Expensive gifts are never expected. The Japanese prefer home-made items, or items made in Ohio, which are more meaningful to them. Please see Host Family Handbook for ideas.

12. Can you explain the city/state translations so that we can understand our exchangee's application form?

- ❑ SHI means city
- ❑ CHO means berg
- ❑ GUN means town
- ❑ KEN means prefecture

13. What is the hardest part of the exchange?

- ❑ Some families are more anxious the first few days of the program because they want their exchangee to be happy and are worried if the child does not immediately respond. Remember be patient and not to expect too much at first.
- ❑ Many families feel they now have another son/daughter/brother/sister.
- ❑ Good-bye is not forever; you now have the opportunity to visit Japan and many Japanese or their family members return here.

14. What are some of the benefits of such an experience?

- ❑ Families become closer.
- ❑ Everyone gains; it broadens experience and interest.
- ❑ Children receive valuable experience in dealing with people from other cultures, which is essential for success in today's interdependent world.

SOME COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE 4-H/LABO EXCHANGE

PREPARATION AND ARRIVAL

Why do the Labo youths arrive during 4-H fair time, and stay (in some cases) until after my child has started school? Why do they come so young?

Arrival and departure dates are determined by Japanese school vacations. Many Labo youths are 12-14 years old. After this age, some are too involved with their schoolwork and must prepare for high school entrance exams.

Will my exchangee be able to speak English? How will we communicate?

The English level of the Labo youths varies widely. All of them have studied English as part of their "Labo Party" activities, but it is done in an informal way, through the use of tapes. Often the tapes feature well-known stories such as Tom Sawyer or English nursery rhymes and games like Old MacDonald or London Bridge. Many Labo youths can recite these rhymes and songs, but have trouble asking for a glass or water. To help communicate, speak slowly. Use as few words as possible, such as "Go in car now" instead of "it's time for us to go somewhere in the car." Use action where necessary. Help him/her learn by saying "I want a glass of water" before you give him/her one.

What will the first few days of the visit be like? Should I plan lots of activities?

Your Labo guest will arrive very tired from travel, and will be on a totally different time zone (14 hours ahead of us). S/he will be shy and reluctant to use his/her English, even if it is fairly good. You may find that s/he is answering "yes" to your questions even if they are not understood. Do not plan lots of activities or any major trips for the first few days. On the other hand, do not let him or her sleep all day, as we want to help them adjust to local time.

Will my Labo youth bring gifts? Will I be expected to reciprocate?

Most Labo youths arrive with many gifts for their host families. Sometimes they are presented right away, sometimes later. If you wish to give your Labo child a gift, they like anything with English writing, such as pencils, t-shirts, souvenirs of Ohio and the U.S.

Some host families have put together albums with pictures of their homes and communities, and of the family and Labo youths during the visit, for him/her to take home. If you have a video camera, you might make a tape showing your home, family, and activities during the Labo youth's visit. You may also wish to send home a small inexpensive gift to each family member.

I have a big house. Can I host an adult and a child, or two youths?

No – this is a policy of Labo. Hosting two Japanese at once would make it harder for your guest to feel like a member of your family. Learning to speak better English is an important goal of the exchange. If you have a Japanese friend nearby, it is okay for them to meet your Labo youth. But be sure that English is the main language your exchangee is exposed to. Incidentally, hosting an exchange student from another country is also discouraged while your Labo youth is here.

ACTIVITIES DURING THE HOMESTAY

May I take the Labo guest on trips?

Yes, if this is part of your family's summer plans. It is not recommended that you stay away from home more than a week. The main idea of the visit is for them to experience normal American life.

Can we go out of state?

Yes, but be sure your county and state 4-H coordinators know how to reach you in case of an emergency at home in Japan. If you plan to visit Canada, you must contact the state coordinator well in advance and follow instructions provided in the Host Family Handbook.

Will my Labo youth stay at home or will s/he want to go off alone?

Some Japanese youths are used to going long distances by subway or bicycle to visit friends, etc. Try to make clear what your families rules are about "excursions" alone.

Do I or my children need to entertain our guest all the time?

No; in fact, Labo youth will need sometime alone to do their schoolwork or write in their journals. It is very difficult for families to keep their exchangee busy constantly, and it is especially hard for host brothers and sisters if they feel like they must entertain their guest all the time.

On the other hand, a Labo youth should not be left alone all the time if the host sister or brother has band, sports, or a job. This is a nice time for siblings to be included as hosts, or neighbors may want to help. At first, TV may be hard to understand. Many host families have rediscovered the fun of playing games such as UNO which do not require skill in English.

Do Japanese youth know how to ride bikes?

Yes, but they are only used to handbrakes. They must be instructed about safety, as many of them have never ridden on a dirt or gravel road. Important: Traffic moves on the other side of the road in Japan, so both bikers and walkers should be reminded to watch for cars.

Can Labo youths become involved in 4-H fairs?

This is encouraged, if your family is involved. They can help care for and show the animals, or could model their traditional Japanese clothes or demonstrate calligraphy. Labo members are interested in learning about 4-H. However, check with your count 4-H professional regarding restrictions on dates and deadlines that may prevent your exchangee from participating.

Should I take my Labo youth camping?

That is fine if it is a normal family activity for you. Be sure to let the state coordinator know your whereabouts. Labo youths enjoy going to Labo camp in Japan. If your child is going to an organized camp during the visit, the Labo youth may be able to go. We just need advance notice in order to arrange permission, physical examinations, and payment of fees. Some families have set up a tent in the backyard if an actual trip is not on the schedule.

MONEY

How much money will my Labo youth bring?

They are told to bring about \$600. This is a guideline, and some bring more. Please help your guest find a safe place to keep money. This is not a gift, so be sure to return the remainder at the end of the visit. Help them budget during the visit, and have them save some money for the two they spend in Columbus before they leave for Japan.

Japanese youths may be more careless than we are about leaving their wallets out in public. They should be told to leave most of their money home when going on shipping trips. If your Labo youth has traveler's checks, s/he may need help cashing them at the bank (be sure to have them bring their passport for ID when cashing traveler's checks. We have had a few reports of Labo youths having trouble cashing traveler's checks at mall, etc.)

Can I take a tax deduction for hosting a Labo student?

No – this only applies to families hosting a year-long student.

Will it be expensive to host?

Host families come from a wide variety of income groups. You are expected to provide your exchangee with food at home, and to pay for restaurant meal and admission costs if you go out. Trips to expensive places, like King's Island, are completely optional. Many families have made these special trips, but do not overlook less expensive outing to state parks, picnics near home, family reunions.

HOSTING ADULTS

Can I host an Adult if I work outside the home?

This often works fine, because most Adults would do fine in a situation where they will be left alone for part of the day. In the case of either adults or youths, it is fine to have some neighbors and friends entertain your exchangee for a day.

Do the Adults attend meetings while here?

During the homestay, the Labo adults should attend the county or area mid-point gathering in order to help translate with host families and Labo youth. They also may need to travel to visit any Labo youth who are having severe difficulties, in case of medical emergency, etc. However, there are no other planned Labo meetings they must attend. They will have lots of writing to do while in your home (postcards to the Labo youths in Ohio, journal-writing, letters home). If they need to make long-distance calls they will have a credit card and/or their own cell phone and you will not have to pay for the calls.

AROUND THE HOUSE

Are the bathrooms in Japan like ours?

You will need to instruct your exchangee about our habits. Some things that are different: In Japan, they lock the door while using the bathroom; they always close the bathroom door when they leave/finish; when someone knocks on the door, they knock back to say that they are in there; they may not know how to use our shower/temperature controls or shower curtains; in Japan, they wash before getting into a bath, and may stay there much longer than we do.

We don't sit down to meals 3 times a day. Will my visitor be able to prepare his or her own snacks or meals?

This is new for your exchangee. It may take a while for you to convey the idea that it's alright for them to help themselves. In Japan, it is rude to open someone else's refrigerator. You should be sure that someone will be at home during all mealtimes to help him or her prepare a snack. In Japan, others usually do all the cooking. Many Japanese youths have never made a sandwich.

Why are my exchangee's table manners different?

In Japan, it is customary to use chopsticks with most foods. It is customary to make noise while eating many foods, particularly noodles, spaghetti, and soups. Belching is not considered as impolite as it is in the U.S.

Should we prepare Japanese food? Why did s/he bring food?

His or her mother may have wondered if they would like American food, but you serve whatever your family normally eats. Japanese youths learn to love things like tacos, hamburgers, and pizza. Be aware that some youths may be a little queasy at first from jet lag or airsickness. The first few days may not be the time to introduce fatty foods like French fries. If your exchangee brings food, encourage them to share it with your family. If they offer to cook, enjoy it!

What about chores?

Since this is a month long stay, you should treat your exchangee more like a family member than a guest. If your youths do chores around the house or farm, assign some chores also to your Labo youth. Be aware that some Japanese youths do not do chores at home and you may need to do some teaching.

Both parents work outside the home. Can we still host?

Yes. The arrangements you make depend on the age of the youth involved. If your own children go to a babysitter, of course the Labo youth should too. IF your child is an older, responsible teen, it is fine if there is not an adult at home. However, there should be a neighbor or relative living close-by in case of emergencies. Please make sure that the Labo youth has something to do if your teen is involved in activities, and be sure to read above about meals.

MEDICAL PROBLEMS

What should I do if my exchangee gets sick?

You will have written permission to act on behalf of the parents and should get medical care immediately in case of any emergencies. In less urgent situations, you will have to use your judgment about what is needed, and you should call on your ICC, the state coordinator or the Labo adults if there is doubt. If the language barrier prevents you from being sure what the problem is, contact the state coordinator or a Labo adult for interpretation. It is recommended that you take your Labo child to the doctor for any of the same reasons you would take your own child. They have excellent medical insurance. See the Host Family Handbook for information re: the insurance company, how to find a doctor, how to submit claims, etc.

Some Japanese youth may resist over-the-counter remedies because they are unfamiliar with them and have brought their own from Japan. You will receive advance notice about other allergies and medical problems and can consult with a Labo coordinator or the state coordinator if you are unsure about medicines, etc. Submit all medical bills to the state coordinator according to the directions elsewhere in the host family handbook.

RETURNING TO JAPAN

Can I send back gifts for my child's family?

That is fine with the following exceptions, which are forbidden from entering Japan:

- ❑ Liquor
- ❑ Raw food (dried or canned is okay)
- ❑ Firearms, gun powder, knives, or weapons of any type, including water guns
- ❑ Fireworks, matches
- ❑ Live plants or animals, dirt, tobacco or alcohol

Also, keep in mind the current restrictions on luggage put into place by the United States Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Do not put your exchangee in a difficult position by having him or her pack something illegal or something that could be used as a weapon. You'll receive detailed information on this topic.

Finally, note that the Labo youth are only allowed to use ONE piece of luggage for their return trip ... the same one that they brought with them to the US at the beginning of the stay. It is not permitted for them to buy additional luggage to fit extra items in. Therefore, be sure you do not send gifts so big that they would require additional luggage.