



Your Steps to America

Au Pair
IN AMERICA

eduCARE
IN AMERICA

Au Pair
Extraordinaire

Welcome!

Thank you for choosing Au Pair in America! Congratulations on passing your interview and being accepted to participate on one of the Au Pair in America programs. The information in this handbook is relevant to all Au Pair in America, Au Pair Extraordinaire and EduCare participants.

Your application is now on its way to start the matching process with one of our carefully selected host families who are looking for an au pair or companion like you!

If you have an e-mail address, you will have already heard from us with details of your password and how to log onto our participant section of the Au Pair in America website.

If you do not have an e-mail address, we suggest you create one NOW and forward your new address to applications@aupairamerica.co.uk - we will then confirm your password by email.

By logging onto our participant site you will have the opportunity to check your personal details, review your placement details with your host family, check your flight details and other relevant information.

This is an exciting area on our website for our participants and allows you to check your progress from acceptance through to your departure, access useful weblinks and resources, and contact us via e-mail at any time.

Visit www.aupairinamerica.com and click on 'Pre-arrival Au Pairs'.

If you have any problems logging onto the site, please contact us on + 44 (0)20 7581 7322.

Au Pair in America for the time of your life!

By becoming an au pair or eduCare companion you have decided to use your experience and interest in caring for children as an opportunity to learn about life in America whilst living with an American family. Your stay in the United States will include opportunities for you to:

- **broaden your childcare abilities**
- **make new friends**
- **take educational courses that interest you or advance your skills**
- **experience a new way of life in a new culture**
- **share your culture with an American family**
- **improve your language skills**
- **travel in the U.S.A.**

Au Pair in America is a program of the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS). AIFS organises cultural exchange programs throughout the world for more than 50,000 students each year. Since 1986, more than 50,000 young adults have travelled to the United States as part of the Au Pair in America program. We have a network of caring individuals who will help you to have a successful and rewarding year. They include your local Interviewer, the Au Pair in America staff and your Community Counselor in the United States.

There are several steps to take before you reach your new home in the United States. Let Au Pair in America be your guide...

STEP ONE

Keep in touch!

Now that we have accepted your application, please be absolutely sure that we can contact you at all times! You have been given a Membership Number so that we may readily identify you as we work with you during the exciting months ahead. Your acceptance letter lists your Membership Number - write this on the pocket at the back of this handbook! Always quote your Membership Number whenever you contact us.

- If changes occur in your life, for example, if you change your address or telephone number, if your availability changes - even if you just go on holiday for a few days - **we must know** how to reach you or you may miss the opportunity to go to America!
- If circumstances change and you are no longer able to commit to the Au Pair in America program, you must contact the London office immediately.

Use the form in the back pocket to notify us, by e-mail, post or fax, of any changes.



STEP TWO

What to do next

There are three things you must do now!

- 1 If you do not have a **passport**, or if you need a new passport before you travel, **apply now!** Check that your current passport is valid for at least 18 months after your arrival in the US.
- 2 Check that your driving license is valid for at least 18 months after your arrival in the US.
- 3 Read this handbook carefully and continue to thoroughly read all Au Pair in America materials that you receive. Do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

'It was great to become part of another family and see how they live, celebrate and learn about their culture'

Katrin Gans, Germany
Placed in Stamford, Connecticut



STEP THREE

The placement process

Your application has been sent to the Au Pair in America office in Stamford, Connecticut. The placement staff will distribute your application to host families whose childcare needs match your experience and whose lifestyle and interests complement yours. The families who receive your application will be the families we consider to be the best match for you.

The Telephone Interview

You will be called by host families who are interested in your application to become an au pair or eduCare companion. This telephone interview is a unique opportunity for you and a family to learn about each other's personalities and expectations. It is very important that you prepare yourself for the interview - always have a list of questions by the telephone with a pen and paper.

When you accept an invitation from a family to join them you are making a commitment to be their au pair or eduCare companion for a minimum of one year. A good relationship with your host family will help to make your stay in the United States a rewarding one. Our advice is that you match with the first host family that you feel comfortable with. In many cases this will be the first host family you talk to.

Like all relationships, the success of your relationship with your host family will depend, to a large degree, on how well your personalities are matched. Consider your relationships with friends to get an idea of what "personality type" works best with yours. You need to consider the characteristics of your prospective host family and think about how your personality will work with theirs.

During the interview the family will ask questions and share important aspects of their family life with you to help determine if you are compatible with each other. You and your family should discuss the following topics:

- 1 Childcare
 - the names and ages of the children and their personality characteristics
 - the family's daily activities
 - your experience
 - their needs and expectations
 - your responsibilities
 - your daily and weekly schedule as their au pair or eduCare companion
- 2 Sharing in their family "lifestyle"
 - your relationship with them as a family member
 - your willingness to accept their "house rules" such as the time they will expect you to come home each evening (known as "curfew") and the type of social activities you may engage in during the year
 - feeling comfortable in the kind of place where they live (the city is more fast paced while the country is probably quieter and more isolated)
 - hobbies and interests you have in common
- 3 Your ability to adapt to a new environment
- 4 Your health and any medical conditions (allergies, asthma, diabetes etc) that may affect your well-being in their home
- 5 If you smoke, the family may ask about your smoking habits and your ability to abstain from smoking in their home or when with their children
- 6 Your goals for and expectations of your stay in the United States and what you hope to do when you return to your home country
- 7 Your driving ability and when, or if, you can expect to have use of a car

The placement process cont'd

It is helpful to write down the topics on the previous page and any related questions that you may have, leaving space for answers so you can fill them in during the telephone call. Keep this and the 'What do to when a family calls' form enclosed in the back pocket, by your phone. Remember to note the host family's name and where they live when they call. If English is not your native language and you do not understand a question or an answer, don't be afraid to ask the family to repeat it or to speak more slowly so that you can understand.

You and the host family will rely on this interview to learn as much as possible about each other, so you should avoid giving "yes-no" responses. Ask questions that encourage conversation.

If the interview goes well, you might make a definite match at the end of that first call, or you and the host family may decide to set up a time to speak again within the next couple of days. Arrange a mutually convenient time for the host family to call again and make sure that you are available to take the call.

At the end of the interview, the host family may invite you to be their au pair or eduCare companion. Once you accept an invitation from a family you should not receive any further calls from other prospective host families. If you do, let them know that you have already accepted an invitation from another family.

If you speak with a host family that you feel you are not compatible with, politely tell them that by saying, for example,

"Thanks for calling, but I don't feel I can care for:

- *<number of >children or*
- *a child aged <age> or*
- *<number of >children aged <age>*

They will appreciate your honesty and the fact that they did not spend more time and expense pursuing a match with you. Just like you, they are interested in making the best possible match. Please note once you have declined a family you will not be reconsidered by this family in the future.

Your Departure Date

When you make a commitment to a host family you must decide, together, upon your departure date. The date you choose will be difficult to change, so please make sure you will be available to fly on the day agreed

upon. Consider any notice you must give your employer and any family commitments that you may have. A family may ask you to come as early as three weeks after their phone call (the minimum time required to obtain your visa and make flight arrangements) or several months later depending upon your availability and their childcare needs. You will generally depart on a Sunday, Monday or Tuesday. You will fly to the New York area where you will stay for three nights after which you will travel to your host family. Please refer to the list of scheduled departure dates in the back pocket. EduCare companions only travel on selected dates during the months of July, August and December.

STEP FOUR

Placement confirmation

The London office will notify you by post to confirm the details of your placement. You will receive:

- instructions and visa papers
- a letter confirming your host family, departure date and departure city
- a copy of your host family's application
- information about the community in the United States in which you will live and its cultural and educational facilities
- information about required payments, optional fees and insurance
- other important information to help you prepare for your year ahead including the "Guidelines for a Successful Year" handbook and information on viewing our pre-departure training video.

You will also be able to view your placement confirmation on the participant website. When you receive your Placement Pack, you must telephone the London office immediately on +44 (0)20 7581 7312 (answer machine only) or email placement@aupairamerica.co.uk to accept the placement you have been offered. When you call, have your placement confirmation letter with you so that you have your Membership Number, your host family name and reference and the date and city of departure ready to confirm your details.

Next, we encourage you to sit down and write your host family a letter. Let them know how much you are looking forward to spending a year with them! It's a good opportunity to ask any additional questions you may have. Consider enclosing a separate note to each of the children to let them know you are looking forward to joining their family and to tell them more about yourself and your home country - enclose a few photographs if you can. Many participants and host families now communicate via e-mail too.

Program Payments

Having accepted your placement you will then be required to send the necessary payments to the appropriate office. You will pay a Program Fee, non-refundable Placement Fee, and where applicable, the flight surcharge payment. You may also purchase the Comprehensive Insurance Plan at this time, should you wish to do so.

Information about these services and how to make payments will be included with your Placement Pack.

International Driver's Permit

You will need to obtain an International Driver's Permit. You must have this before departing so that you are legally able to drive should your host family require you to do so. An International Driver's Permit is only valid for 12 months from the date of issue. It is important, therefore, that you obtain it just before you travel abroad and not several weeks before your scheduled departure date. Please note that an International Driver's Permit cannot be obtained in the United States. (If the International Driver's Permit is not available in your country, you must be prepared to obtain the United States License as quickly as possible upon arrival in the United States.)

STEP FIVE

Obtaining your visa

Unless you are matched several months ahead of your flight date, your Placement Pack will contain the forms and instructions to apply for your J-1 Visa.

Important!

Act quickly when you get these materials. Follow all instructions carefully. Delays and mistakes could cost you your departure!

STEP SIX

Flight information and airline tickets

Au Pair in America will provide you with your international airline flight. Approximately 7-10 days before your scheduled departure date, instructions on how you will receive your airline ticket will be available on the participant website. You may fly using an electronic airline ticket (e-ticket). If you are travelling with a group of 5 or more, you may be given your ticket by an Au Pair in America representative at the airport on the day of departure.

Au Pair in America must receive your **payments** before you may depart for the United States.

STEP SEVEN

Arrival in the United States

You will most likely fly to the United States with a group of au pairs and eduCare companions. If you fly alone you will join up with the group to spend the first four days at Orientation near New York City.

You will be met at the airport in the United States by an Au Pair in America representative who will transport you to your accommodation. The name, address and telephone number of the Orientation site will be sent to you along with your flight information before your departure.

The Orientation training session will be a fun, informative and very busy program and your attendance will be required at all sessions. The program is prepared and presented by Au Pair in America's experienced staff and by instructors from the American Red Cross. Au Pair in America staff are available to assist you during Orientation 24 hours a day.

While accommodation, meals, transfer on arrival and tips are provided during Orientation you will need enough US Dollars to cover your personal expenses and for transfer from Orientation to the railway station or airport when you leave to travel to your family.

You will receive details about your onward travel to your host family during Orientation.

STEP EIGHT

Joining your host family

At the conclusion of Orientation you will finally have the opportunity to meet your host family! In their home there will be a private bedroom for you. Your host family will live in a community where there are other Au Pair in America au pairs and eduCare companions.

The first three days with your host family will be an especially important time. One of your host parents or another responsible adult will be at home to help you adapt to your new surroundings and community. They will explain your childcare duties and what your daily schedule will be. This will be the time to ask as many questions as you need to so that you fully understand your schedule and responsibilities.

The responsibilities you have will depend, in part, on the ages of the children that you will be caring for. Your responsibilities may include:

- waking the children, dressing infants and toddlers, bathing and playing with the children
- preparing meals for the children, tidying away their belongings, making the children's beds and doing their laundry
- driving children to and from school, appointments or outings
- caring for the children while they are asleep if the parents are not at home

Your host family will plan your schedule. Au pairs should expect to be caring for the children or have childcare related duties for up to, but not more than 45 hours a week and no more than 10 hours a day. EduCare companions should expect to be caring for children of school age and not more than 30 hours a week and no more than 10 hours a day. You and your host family will sign an agreement to this effect. The schedule established for you will depend on when the host parents require you to care for their children.

American families lead very busy lives. It is difficult to describe a typical day because each family is different. We offer the following examples to give you an idea of what you might expect:

- **A family with both parents working outside the home:** If the host parents are both working full time and have children under school age it is likely that most of your childcare provision or "on duty" time

will be during the day when they are at work. Some host parents work five days per week, others work what is known as a 'condensed' work-week in that they work fewer days during the week but generally more hours during the days they are working.

- **A family with one or both parents working from home:** Some host parents work from home, with an established area of their home as their office. Childcare hours need to be clearly established and children need to learn to adapt to having an au pair responsible for them while the parent is working.
- **A family with only one parent working:** In this situation, you may have sole charge of the children at particular times and be sharing responsibilities with the at-home host parent at other times. Your daily duties may change frequently as their needs change.
- **A single-parent family:** It is likely that your childcare schedule would be during the times that the host parent is unavailable to care for the children.

The type of childcare you will provide will depend upon the ages of the children:

- **Infants:** It is likely that you will be at home or in the neighbourhood for most, if not all, of the time that you are providing childcare. Your responsibility will be to ensure that the baby's most basic needs are met.
- **Toddlers:** Beyond meeting the basic needs of dressing, bathing and feeding, the care you provide involves stimulating and playful activities which both teach and entertain. As children reach an age where they have friends, parents often arrange for their children to join a "play group" or other organised activity. In the United States there is a wide variety of programs available for young children.
- **Pre-school age:** Children as young as three or four may attend a pre-school program that meets for a few hours, two or more days during the week. Your childcare schedule may be broken up during the day with a period of time when you are free to do as you wish while the children are in school.
- **School age:** (eduCare companions will only be caring for school aged children.) By the age of five or six, most American children are in school some portion of each weekday. You may be required to drive the children to and from their school and activities. If all the children you care for are school age, typically you will be "on duty" some time in the early morning preparing breakfast, making lunches and making sure they get to school. You may be free until mid afternoon to take a class or do other things for yourself. Your childcare hours may then stretch into the evenings as you assist with dinner and homework.

Being able to handle several different things at once will be important. It is likely that you will be caring for more than one child and that those children may be of different age groups and therefore have different needs. The hours you work may be only during weekdays or may be a combination of weekdays and weekends.

First and foremost, your host parents will expect you to be a responsible individual whom they can trust to take care of their children in a safe and nurturing way. By being an au pair or eduCare companion you are, in effect, becoming a member of an American family. You will be sharing in their day-to-day lives and in the duties associated with family life, much as you would in your own home. In addition to childcare you should expect to share time with your host parents, whether at meals, during the evening or at weekends, and you should remember that you are a family member who joins in and shares the responsibilities of family life.

In addition to the care you provide, there will be many opportunities for you to explore your community both with your host family and with the new friends you will make in the United States.



STEP NINE

Your community counselor and your “cluster”

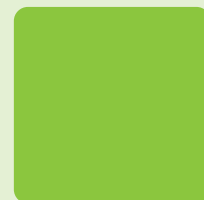
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By becoming an au pair or eduCare companion with Au Pair in America you become part of a cluster, a group of other au pairs and eduCare companions within a community. The cluster, under the guidance of the Community Counselor, acts as a support system for the group of au pairs and eduCare companions and their host families. Some clusters are small and other clusters are large.

Within 48 hours of your arrival in your host family's home your Community Counselor will be in touch with you and within two weeks of your arrival she or he will meet with you and your host family. The Community

Counselor is Au Pair in America's local representative and is there to provide information and guidance to all members of the cluster.

During the year your Community Counselor will plan a monthly meeting or activity for you and the other au pairs and eduCare companions in your cluster to attend. These are opportunities to meet socially with other participants, share your experiences, talk about any concerns and have some fun! Your Community Counselor will also help you to select and register for educational courses.





Questions and answers

As you plan for your coming year in America there are many questions you will have. In this section we will address some of the questions commonly asked prior to placement.

■ How quickly will I be chosen?

The time between your Au Pair in America interview and your selection by a host family varies. According to our host families, the single most important aspect of an au pair's or eduCare companions application is her childcare experience. This, coupled with the dates that you are available, are two factors which may influence a family's decision.

Families typically start to review applications two to three months before the time they would like an au pair to arrive in their home. However, some families need assistance as soon as possible. If you indicate that you are available immediately or within the next twelve weeks, it is likely that your application will be distributed to host families immediately after it is received in our US office.

If your earliest date of availability is more than three months away, it may be a few weeks before you receive a call from a prospective host family. Do not forget eduCare companions only depart in July, August or December.

■ Can I care for infants if I have less than 200 hours of childcare experience with children under the age of two years?

United States Government regulations require that you have a minimum of 200 hours of infant childcare experience before caring for American children under two years of age. Au Pair in America requires that this experience was gained within the last three years.

If you have applied to the program well in advance of the dates you are available and you are currently gaining under two's childcare experience, you may wish to complete the enclosed "Revised Documented Childcare Experience" form when you have gained the required experience. Fax or mail the form to our London office. If you have not already accepted a placement, we can add this to your file and then also circulate your application amongst families with children under the age of two years.

■ What is the weekly payment I should expect to receive from my host family?

The minimum weekly payment amounts are set by the US government. host families are presently required to pay their au pair a minimum of US \$139.05 per week. Participants on the Au Pair Extraordinaire program can expect to receive US \$200.00 weekly payment and eduCare companions can expect to receive US \$105.00 weekly payment.

■ Can I choose the location of my host family?

No. Our experience has shown that the family you join is more important than their location in the United States. Au Pair in America is a cultural exchange program that offers the opportunity for you to experience a new community, a new culture and a new way of life! Remember that you are able to travel in the United States during your vacation time and your thirteenth month.

■ I have never lived in another country. Will I be able to cope with the changes?

Yes, you will be able to cope, if you first accept the fact that it will be different. Initially, you may feel a little homesick, but most au pairs and eduCare companions overcome this - you will have your host family, your Community Counselor, your fellow au pairs and eduCare companions and members of the Stamford and London staff to support you and help you adapt to your new surroundings.

Think and plan carefully now, while you are still at home, for the year that lies ahead. Your determination has brought you this far, so....

wait for your phone call...pack your bags...and we'll see you in the USA!

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