



 **INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT PROGRAM**

2026-2027 Homestay Guide for Students



Thank you for choosing to study in Saskatoon with Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools and welcome to Canada!

Studying and living away from home is exciting but can also be overwhelming, especially at the beginning. Doing everything you can to be well-prepared will help to ensure that you have a positive and memorable experience. Two things you can do to prepare are:

1. Become familiar with all the items in this student homestay guide and
2. Make sure you fully read and understand the Student Participation Agreement that you signed and ask questions if you are unsure of any items in it.

The GSCS homestay coordinator will check in with you regularly, but someone is always available by phone if you have any questions or challenges during your stay. Be sure to attend all meetings with your homestay coordinator and to respond when they reach out to you. This will also help you have a positive and rewarding experience.



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Preparing for Homestay

The homestay experience is extremely valuable and adds an extra layer to both your Canadian experience and opportunity to improve your English abilities. GSCS International Student Program Homestay will provide you with:

- A Canadian host family who has been carefully vetted including character reference and criminal record checks, and who will care for you and provide a safe environment.
- A comfortable, healthy and supportive home including a furnished room with a bed, window, storage and study space verified by our team during in-person visits.
- 3 meals a day.
- 24/7 support during your entire stay.

You have the opportunity to select your top three school choices on your application. We will try our best to grant your school request, however, we believe that it is more important to find a good homestay match for you so you may not get your first choice in schools. The quicker you apply, the better your chances for both a compatible match AND your top school choice. We start to find a suitable match once the placement fee has been paid.

Orientation Sessions

There will be at least one mandatory online orientation session prior to your arrival in Saskatoon. This session will prepare you for your homestay experience and cover topics such as transportation, what to expect with day-to-day Canadian family life, health care and you and your parents will have the chance to ask questions. There will also be an in-person orientation session during your first week of classes with the ISP director about other topics including school expectations. See the student handbook for more information about school prior to the in-person orientation.

Tips for a Positive Experience

1. Lean on your Homestay Family: You are likely to experience feelings of homesickness, nervousness, and being overwhelmed. This is completely normal – you are taking on a new adventure away from home and this takes a great deal of courage. Your homestay family is happy to help you navigate challenges before, during and after your arrival. They can help you to make the most of your time outside of school by suggesting resources and options for socializing and entertainment.

They can only do this, however, if you open up to them and share your interests and personality. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It's very difficult to help someone if they don't know that help or support is needed.

2. Exchange Culture: Your homestay family is just as excited to learn about you and your cultural background as you are to learn about Canada and what it means to be Canadian. Bring things from home that you can share with them like recipes, games, snacks and traditions. Share photos from home with them and tell them about special family and cultural traditions, especially those connected to holidays.

Please remember that it is never ok to discriminate based on race, religion, sexual orientation, age, family composition or ethnic origin. Keep an open mind and be respectful. There is no one way to be or look like a Canadian family. Diversity is one of the things that makes Canada so special.



3. Helping Around the House: Homestay is not a hotel and there are no housekeeping services in homestay. You are expected to keep your own living space clean and to also volunteer to tidy the shared living spaces like the kitchen and living room. You may also be asked to help with meal preparation. You are not expected to clean the entire house and do all the household chores, but it is reasonable to expect that you will help, just like with your own family.



4. Be Curious and Have Fun: When done right, homestay can be a valuable addition to your studies in Canada and create many positive memories and connections that can last a lifetime. You have been given the opportunity to fully immerse in Canadian family life and, with homestay, you are not just a roommate or a tenant in the house, but you are part of the family. Embrace the chance to tag along for a grocery or errands run, participate in family movie night or game night, get to know your host family's friends, neighbors and extended family and ask to be introduced to people with common interests. This will help you to bond with your homestay family and have a positive and memorable experience.



5. Don't Be Afraid to Talk About Challenges: Make sure to share your concerns or challenges with either your host family, your homestay coordinator or both. Small things can grow into big issues when they aren't addressed in a timely fashion. We want you to have the best experience possible and so does your homestay family. We also want it to be a positive experience for your host family. Clear communication is the key to a successful homestay experience.

Homestay Basics

Airport Transportation

Please send us your flight details as soon as possible so we can arrange for airport transportation and let us know if there are any updates to your itinerary. You and your host family will receive a confirmation email outlining the airport pick up process.

Connect with your host family before you leave your home country to discuss any special pick-up instructions. For example, will they be waiting inside the airport or parked outside? If you do not see your host family at the airport by the time you have collected your luggage, please call our team at (306) 290-1921.

Arrival

When you arrive at your homestay, ask your family for a tour of the home, to meet all the family members, and to be told about any special instructions.

Make a list of the home address, important names and phone numbers and always keep these with you.

- Make sure to ask about the following items:
 - Bathroom – shower (including curtain), toilet (including how much paper and what can be flushed) and sink
 - Appliances – microwave, stove/oven, dishwasher, clothes washing machine and dryer
 - Electronics – internet/ Wi-Fi, phone, TV
 - Safety – fire safety plan (exits and emergency phone numbers: 9-1-1) and location and use of fire extinguishers

Be respectful of everyone's privacy and discuss the family routine and schedule.

House Rules

Every family has their own unique habits, preferences and routines. These may be very similar or very different from your own personal family experience, so it is important to have an open mind and to be flexible. It is very important to discuss the house rules with your homestay family once you arrive. It is also very important to remember that, even if you don't agree with them, you must follow the house rules to remain placed with the homestay family. Some of these may include, but are not limited to:

- When in the day to have a bath or a shower (and for how long) – this is especially important in larger families
- Where food is located and what can and cannot be eaten
- When and how to do laundry (it will likely be expected that you are responsible for doing your own laundry)
- Curfew times (may differ depending on the day of the week)
- Limits on the use of electronics in the home
- Family schedules and bedtime hours
- Allergies and limitations on scents, including some types of foods and perfumes/ colognes
- Any private area of the home that your host may ask you not to enter
- Whether or not you can ask a friend to come visit you at the house

Always ask questions if you are unsure of something – good communication is key to a positive experience for everyone.

Your Bedroom

Your bedroom will include, at a minimum, a window, bed with bedding, storage (closet and/or dresser) and a study space. Please let us know if anything is different from what was expected and remember that it may be very different from your own room at home.

It is very common for students to feel cold at first as Canadians tend to set their thermostat a bit lower than you may be used to. Do not adjust the

thermostat yourself – please ask your host family to provide you with extra blankets if you are cold and dress in extra layers until your body adjusts.

Hosts may enter a student's room by asking permission or giving notice, such as knocking on the door and waiting for the student's approval to enter. Students must allow hosts into their room in a timely manner – this is to ensure your safety. We have also encouraged hosts to check student rooms from time to time to ensure cleanliness and hygiene standards (food hasn't been left out which attracts bugs) or to check for damages. This also requires permission from the student. Students are responsible for any damage caused to the home during their stay.



The Bathroom

Ask your host to explain their expectations around the use of the bathroom. Most likely, you will be sharing the bathroom with family members and/or another student, and there may be a schedule around bathroom use, especially if there are multiple people using the same bathroom. It is important to keep to your allotted time so that everyone in the home has a chance to use the bathroom to get ready in the morning.

Each Canadian home has its own hot water tank with a limited supply of hot water, so it is important that everyone does their part in limiting their use of hot water. Also, toilet paper is designed to be flushed after every use and NOT disposed of in the garbage. Make sure not to flush too much toilet paper at a time or the toilet can become plugged, and water can flood the bathroom causing damage. Feminine products such as tampons and pads must be

disposed of in the garbage – DO NOT flush these items in the toilet. Flushing items other than toilet paper can cause damage to the plumbing, resulting in costly repairs.

Food and the Kitchen



Food is a huge part of connecting with others and of learning a new culture. It can be fun to learn about your host family's favourite foods and sharing what you like to eat. If you get the chance, you could make your host family a meal or treat that is one of your favourites from your home country.

It is very common for you to experience food flavours and textures that may be unfamiliar to you, but we ask that you give everything a try at least once (unless you have food allergies or a specific diet). If you really do not like a certain food, and have given it a good try, gently and respectfully make your host family aware. Food can be one of the most difficult things to adjust to in a new country, but it can also be one of the most enjoyable.

Your host family will show you what food items you can help yourself to, and what items should be saved for a later purpose. Make sure to ask questions and to follow all safety measures before operating appliances in the kitchen. As a minor, you are not to access the stove or oven without supervision, although the microwave and toaster are fine, if your host family agrees.

Let your host family know what foods you like to eat and join them when grocery shopping so you can see what foods are available in Canadian stores.

*Please note that there will be an extra charge if you request a specialized diet (vegan, vegetarian, gluten free, halal, extra protein, etc.) as this is an extra cost of host families.

While your host family will be providing food and meals for you, it doesn't mean that they will serve you or that their home is your own personal restaurant. It is common for students to prepare their own breakfast and lunch, for instance. Please ask your host where food is stored and how to make a simple breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Breakfast:

Breakfast is usually quick and light on weekdays, but families sometimes prepare breakfast together on weekends. Some families eat a hot breakfast, while others prefer something cold. Some examples of breakfast can include cereal and milk, toast/ bagels, eggs, or yogurt, fruit and granola.

Lunch:

Lunch usually consists of a light main course, a drink and a light dessert or piece of fruit. Lunch foods can include leftovers from previous meals, a sandwich, raw vegetables and dip, cookies or fruit. This meal is eaten around 12:00 noon and, since lunch is usually eaten at school, you will take yours with you. Should you choose to buy lunch from the cafeteria or off campus, this will be at your own cost.

Dinner:

Also sometimes referred to as “supper”, this is usually the largest and most important meal of the day and is usually enjoyed between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. depending on the family's routine and schedule. It is very important to let your host family know when you will be home for dinner. If you are late, they can leave a portion for you in the fridge to heat up when you get home. Dinner foods can include protein (chicken, beef, pork, fish, tofu, legumes, etc.), vegetables and starch (pasta, rice, potatoes).



Dinner time is a great opportunity to talk about your day with your host family and bond with them.

Chores and Housework

Your host family will welcome you into their home as a member of their family. This means that you likely will be asked to do your share of the housework.

Bedroom:

Keep your room clean by making your bed, putting your clothes away, and picking items off the floor each day. Depending on the type of flooring, vacuum, sweep and/or mop the floor at least once per week and take the garbage out regularly.

Bathroom:

Leave the bathroom clean and dry after each use. In Canada, our home construction can be different from what you are used to, and water can be very damaging.

Mealtimes:

Help with meal preparation, setting and clearing the table, washing dishes, etc.



Laundry:

Ask your host about their laundry routine and who is responsible for doing laundry, as it is different in each family. If you are responsible for doing your own laundry, ask your host to show you how to use the machines, including how much detergent and clothing can be added to each load.

Other:

Remember to always keep the home tidy and to pick up after yourself as you move through the house. You may be asked to help with other tasks such as taking out the garbage or helping to shovel the snow during winter months. Let someone from our team know if you are being asked to do excessive amounts or unreasonable tasks around the house, as that is not the expectation.

Telephone and Internet Use

Having a Canadian cell phone number (or an international data plan) is an important safety requirement. Please share your Canadian number with your host family members and our team as soon as possible and always keep your personal cell phone charged. Please reach out to our team if you need help setting up a local phone plan and we can let you know about different options.

Your homestay parents will have expectations around the length of time you spend on your personal devices, especially those connected to the house Wi-Fi, as well as around the length and timing of your phone calls. Please respect the family routines and do not disturb the sleep schedule of the home.

In case of emergency, dial 9-1-1. You will be connected with an operator who will be able to send medical, police or fire services right away. Always keep your home address readily accessible, as you will need to provide this information to the operator.

Transportation around Saskatoon

Take a few days after you arrive to get to know your neighbourhood and the community of Saskatoon. Ask your host to help with directions and planning public transportation options as well as information about local attractions in the area.

Some hosts live within walking distance to the school while others are a bus ride away. There is a student bus pass available to purchase through the Saskatoon Transport Services, should you wish to have one and the cost is around \$60.00 CAD/month. It's a good idea to do a practice trip to school before your first day of school so that you know how long it takes to either walk, bike or take the bus to school.

Your host family may be able to provide you with transportation during your stay; however, this is not an expectation – do not expect to be offered daily rides. If you would like support from your host family with transportation, you must give the family as much notice as possible.



Mental Health Supports

We are here to help if you are feeling homesick, overwhelmed, anxious or just need to talk with someone. Our team is available to help you navigate all aspects of your journey in Canada including homestay, school, travel and life in general.

In addition, you can access the school counsellors, call or text the Kids' Help Phone (1-800-668-6868 or Text CONNECT to 686868), or, if you have Ingle Lower private insurance (full plan or top-up plan), you can call their helpline at 1-833-643-6088 to speak to a credentialed counsellor in your preferred language about anything that is having an adverse effect on your mental health.

*In the case of a mental health crisis, call 9-1-1 right away.

GSCS Homestay Expectations

To maintain your participation status with the GSCS Homestay Program you must follow rules that are designed to keep you safe and in line with our values and the promises we made to both you and your host family.

Just a reminder that these rules, as well as expectations regarding school, were included on the participation agreement that was signed by both you and your parents when applying to be part of the GSCS International Student Program. These are a few items from that agreement to highlight regarding homestay participation:

Curfews:

It is expected that, as a high school student, you should be home by 6:00 pm on school nights, except when engaging in extra-curricular activities through school or with permission from your host family from time to time. A big part

of participating in homestay is having time to connect with your homestay family and create bonds and lasting memories.

On non-school nights, curfew is as follows:

- Ages 11-13: 10:00 pm
- Ages 14-16: 11:00 pm
- Ages 17-18: 12:00 am

*Be sure to notify your host immediately if you will be late for curfew so they do not worry about you. Being late for curfew may result in not being allowed to stay out late the next time you ask.

Driving:

You absolutely **cannot** drive a motor vehicle, motorcycle, motor scooter or any other motorized form of transportation (including watercraft) and you may not obtain a Canadian driver's licence while in the GSCS Homestay Program.

Social Media:

Refrain from posting on the internet and social media platforms photos, audio and video recordings and comments without prior consent from all parties involved (e.g. school, host family, etc.). Once something has been posted, you lose control over it, and it cannot be taken back.

Meetings with Homestay Coordinator:

Regular check-ins with your homestay coordinator are very important. Be sure to attend all meetings with your homestay coordinator and respond when they reach out to you.

Travel While in Homestay:

Travels (including day trips) outside of Saskatoon require an adult who is at least 25 years of age to accompany the student. For travels outside of Saskatoon without the host or for any overnight outside of the home (including a sleepover at a friend's house or a family trip with the host family), the

student must complete an Activity Permission Form (APR) to receive approval from our team.



We will provide you with a digital copy of the form to complete once you have reached out to let us know your plans. The APR must be completed at least one week before the date of the planned activity so that we have time to consider the request and to speak with everyone involved. Students are responsible for completing the form and collecting signatures from the host and natural parents. If you are requesting permission for a sleepover at the house of another student who is being hosted by a GSCS homestay family, the APR doesn't need to be completed. A What's App message or email from your host parent stating that you have their permission and the permission of the other host family will suffice.

Communication

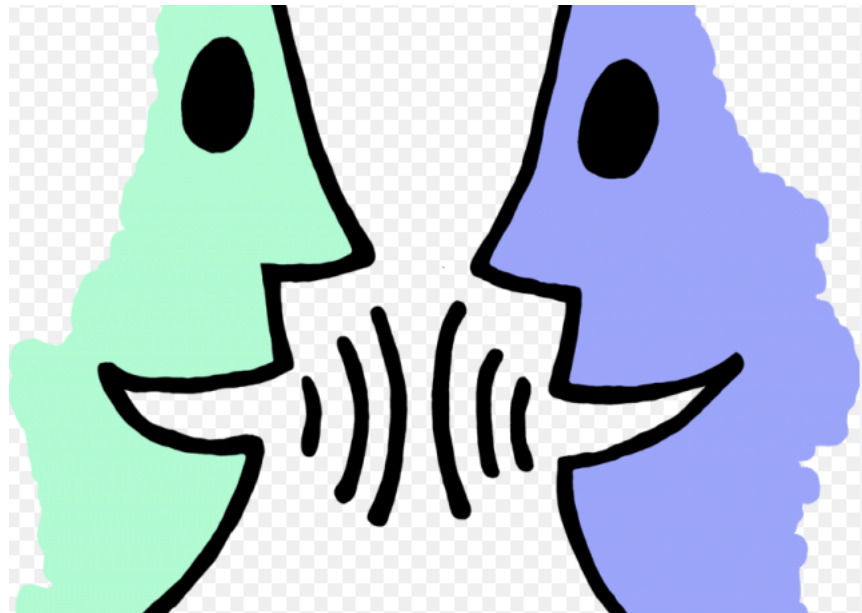
You have chosen to study in Canada to improve and become more confident in English and that shows that you are very brave. Always remember that mistakes happen and a new language is not easy to master. Give yourself time and be kind to yourself during the learning process.

The best way to improve your English is to practice. It is ok to ask people to speak slower or to repeat themselves to help you better understand what they are saying. Use English as much as possible, both in school and with your

host family. You may have to step outside of your normal comfort zone but try to use English in as many simple daily activities as possible (e.g. preparing and eating meals, shopping, exercising and watching tv).

Try to give full answers to questions – for example, instead of a simple “yes” or “no”, provide reasons, examples or opinions. Ask your host to explain idiomatic expressions (phrases that have a non-literal meaning) or slang, as these can be difficult to understand. For example, “hang on” means “one moment please” or “please wait”.

When asked if you understand something, be honest. Do not say that you understand for the sake of harmony; instead, ask for help. Ask if your host understands you as well – communication is a two-way street. This will take effort and some getting used to, but the outcome will be well worth it. Don’t be afraid to speak slowly if you are having trouble making yourself understood or to rephrase what you are saying by using different words.



Overcoming Challenges

We sincerely want your homestay experience to be rewarding and enjoyable. There may be moments when you encounter difficulties and that is part of the learning process. These moments are often the result of poor communication, miscommunication or a mutual inability to compromise.

- If you experience problems or feel unhappy, speak with your host family immediately. Often issues are not as big as they seem. Your host family wants you to enjoy your time in Saskatoon and may not be aware that there is an issue. Talking about the situation and looking at what can be done to solve the problem is the first step, even if it is uncomfortable. *If you have tried speaking with your host family, and do not feel the problem has been resolved, please reach out to our team.
- If problems seem to come up again and again between you and your host, please let us know. In many cases, we start with a mediation conversation between you and your host and give ideas or advice on possible resolutions or next steps. The idea is to ensure that everyone understands the issue, including your agents and/or natural parents as needed, and that everyone has a chance to share their perspective.
- Relocation is the last resort as it can be quite disruptive to your homestay experience. Often if students and hosts put in the effort and try to compromise, the issue can be resolved. The expression, “The grass isn’t always greener on the other side” applies to relocations as well. Sometimes, though, relocations are required. For example, a student can be relocated if they are disrespectful toward their host family or refuse to abide by the family’s rules. We can also relocate a student if their host family is not abiding by the guidelines and rules of our program or if the host family has an emergency and is no longer able to host them.

Always reach out to a member of our team if you have questions or concerns.

*If it is an emergency, please call (306) 290-1921 at any time, after dialing 9-1-1 if it is that kind of emergency. If it is not an emergency, and can wait until the

next school day, please email or send a WhatsApp or text message to a member of our team and someone will respond to you during office hours.

Director: Kari Weiman: Office (306) 659-7689 or Mobile/ WhatsApp (306)290-1921 kweiman@gscs.ca

Homestay Coordinator: Malvina Rapko: Office (306) 659-7689 or Mobile/ WhatsApp (306) 371-5457 homestay@gscs.ca

ISP Coordinator: Tammy Chartier-Anderson: Office (306) 659-7688
international@gscs.ca

We hope you have a memorable and enjoyable experience studying with the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools International Student Program!