

Guidance for guests

Refugees at Home is a charity, run mostly by volunteers. Hosts offer a spare space in their homes to guests, who may be refugees or asylum seekers. It is a temporary arrangement while you, and the people who are advising you, work out how to find somewhere more permanent for you to stay. All of our hosts have offered to help because they want to welcome refugees and know how hard it can be to start a new life.

Hosts will offer you a safe place to sleep and the use of a kitchen and bathroom. Some may be able to offer you a room but in emergencies we may only be able to find a place with a sofa bed or mattress.

Hosting is offered to you for free and hosts are not paid: this is not part of a government scheme. We are a charity and hosts offer what they can because they believe it is the right thing to do.

REFUGEES AT HOME'S ROLE

We will arrange a home visit of hosts, ask for information about guests and may arrange follow-up visits and provide other limited forms of support for hosts and guests. We do not provide social work services or other regulated services (including care, medical or legal services) to guests, hosts or anybody else.

Refugees at Home will not be responsible for confirming the accuracy of information provided by hosts or guests or managing the continuing relationship between hosts and guests. We assume we are matching consenting and informed adults who will take responsibility for their continuing relationship. We will not pay hosts and you should not offer your host payment, or sign any documents or agreements with your host. We will do what we can to ensure a successful placement but cannot guarantee this.

LOCATION

We will try to match you with a host close to where you would like to be and, when we can, for the length of time you and your referrer think it will take for you to move on to the next stage. We may not be able to find you a host in the place you'd prefer. Sometimes we may only be able to find a host who can help you for a short period and we will then work hard to find another host for you to move to. We wish we could give you more choice about this, but we are always short of hosts, especially in big cities like London.

If you need hosting for a longer period, especially if you are an asylum-seeker and really do not know how long this may be, we will ask you to be flexible about where you are prepared to go. We have more hosts in the suburbs where houses are usually bigger, rather than in city centres.

All of our hosts have been assessed and should provide you with a welcome and a safe place to sleep. If you have any problems please talk to your referrer or let us know. We will do all we can to help sort things out.

PETS

It is very common in Britain for people to have pets in their home e.g. a cat or a dog. If you are really worried about living with an animal, please let us know. However, you may come to enjoy having pets in the house. It's an important part of British culture and getting to know your hosts' pets will help you to understand them and the way we live more generally. Hosts may get upset if you suggest having pets in the house is dirty or unclean.

TOLERATING DIFFERENCE

We do not ask hosts or guests about anything that is not relevant to the hosting. This includes their religious beliefs and practices, although some referrers do give us this information about guests they refer to us. We ask that everyone is respectful and tolerant of differences. Similarly, we do not ask about sexuality and sexual practices. Some of our hosts have asked us to talk to guests about their sexuality because they do not want to make their guest feel uncomfortable or feel uncomfortable themselves. Many hosts will drink alcohol and eat pork- which is common in British society- while others will not. Some hosts are vegetarian and may ask that you do not bring meat into their home. You do not have to eat or drink anything you don't want to but should respect your hosts' practices. Britain is generally a very tolerant society and people live their lives in many different ways. We ask our hosts to respect their guests and we ask the same of our guests.

ARRIVAL

When we find you a host, your referrer will explain to you where they live and what to expect. If you have made a self-referral, we will talk to you directly about this. Your hosts will have agreed a time for you to arrive and you should have the phone number of your referrer or one of the Refugees At Home admin team and your host, so you can call if you get lost or are going to need to change the plans for arrival. Sometimes it can be alarming to go the door of someone you've never met. Please try not to worry – our hosts tend to be kind, generous and honest people who want to help. They are likely to welcome you with a smile and explain how things work in their home.

SECURITY

Some hosts will give you a set of keys but others will not. Hosts will talk to you about when they will be home and what to do about security including burglar alarms. In cities, hosts have to be very careful to make sure doors and windows are secure – you must follow their instructions about security and be very careful if you are given keys. When your stay with that host comes to an end, please make sure you give the keys back.

If you have friends nearby, you must ask your hosts beforehand whether they can come and visit you. It's probably a good idea to get to know your hosts before you ask about this. Most hosts will not expect you to ask people to stay in their house. Please never ask someone to stay unless you have checked with your host.

HINTS AND TIPS

Here are some things to remember about being hosted:

- Most hosts will either prepare an evening meal for you or let you use the kitchen to prepare your own food. We will have told them if you have any special dietary needs which we know about and they will do their best to help with that.
- They will explain to you about their daily routine – when they leave the house in the morning, what time they get in at the end of the day, when they like to lock the house up for the night. Please remember that hosts need to sleep, especially when they go to work early or have children – don't make a lot of noise at night and let your hosts know your plans for the evening.
- If a host expects you to be at home by a certain time, make sure that you're there on time. If you are going to be late, or you want to stay with a friend, please call or message your hosts to let them know that you will be running late or staying elsewhere. Your host will worry if you don't tell them what you are doing. They may think you are in danger or in trouble. Please make sure they do not have to worry unnecessarily.
- You may feel shy but try to get to know your hosts if you can. They understand you may want to have some private time and will also understand if you need to spend time resting or seeing people you know. Do try to share a meal with them and talk to them. They should not ask you for details about your life before you arrived in the UK but they will be interested in you, your family and your life if you want to share this with them.
- Many hosts will be interested about the food you eat in your home country. If you cook, offer food to your hosts too. They will enjoy learning about your culture and food is something we all share an interest in.
- The more you spend time with your hosts, the quicker you will improve your English and get to understand British culture. Try to listen to the radio and watch British TV too! If your host offers to take you to friends, family, their place of worship, or an event, it's because they think you will enjoy meeting different people and trying British things. Try to say yes to as many offers as possible.
- Very few hosts will be happy for you to smoke in their homes. If you smoke, please ask your hosts where you can do it and where you should put the cigarette butts. If you drink alcohol, ask your host if they are happy for you to bring alcohol into their home. Do not use illegal substances (including marijuana) in your host's home.
- Your hosts will offer you the use of their washing machine. Please ask if you're not sure how it works. They will also explain how to get your clothes dry again. If you stay with your hosts for longer than a week, they will expect you to change the sheets on your bed and wash your towels.
- You should also tidy your room, clean up after you've cooked anything and help keep the house tidy, especially the kitchen and bathroom.
- Your hosts will not expect you to work in the house in return for staying there but they will appreciate it if you offer to do small things like taking out the rubbish,

washing up if someone cooks you a meal or putting the dishes away. You should also always tidy up after yourself.

- Treat your host's house with respect- lock doors when you go out, close windows or anything else they ask you to do to keep the house secure. If something gets broken (accidents do happen), tell your host and apologise.

Our hosts are willing to allow you to stay with them because your referrer, or the person who gave you a reference, explained that you are a good person who needs help to settle in the UK. Our hosts are often nervous about having a stranger to stay in their house- just as you may be nervous about arriving there - remember that and you may quickly find some common ground.

CHILDREN OF THE HOSTS

Many of our hosts have children. They will usually be curious and friendly and can quickly become your best friend in the house. Views about bringing up children may be different to what you are used to. Make sure you check with hosts before giving the child any food for example sweets, or correcting their behaviour.

RESPECT AND SAFETY

Many of our hosts are single people, including single women. British society does not judge a woman living alone as immoral or as in any way available to a man. Guests should always treat the women in the home respectfully, like you might an elderly aunt. The same respect must be shown to other women or girls living in the host's home, to female visitors and to every female working in the house of a host family such as a cleaner, a nanny, an au pair or housekeeper. Guests should never approach, flirt with, or treat with anything other than respect, anyone in the house. If a host is worried about the behaviour of a guest towards someone in the house, they will ask them to leave immediately and we will support that. We will not arrange hosting for anyone about whom a complaint of sexual or other serious bad behaviour has been made. We also warn our hosts that they should not take advantage of their guest's vulnerability and we will take any complaints or concerns expressed about hosts very seriously.

We have a safeguarding policy which is about keeping our guests and hosts safe. The Safeguarding policy can be found on the Refugees At Home website or you can ask us to send you a copy.

If you have any worries, talk to your referrer or to someone you trust or to one of the Refugees at Home admin team. We will take what you say seriously and support you.

YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION

Your referrer will generally give us any information about you which they think is relevant to arranging hosting for you, which may sometimes include sensitive information, for example about your religious beliefs, ethnic origin or health. Your referrer should explain this to you and ask you for your consent before giving us any sensitive personal information, and we will ask them to confirm that they have done this. We will only use your information for the

purpose of arranging and monitoring hosting. You do not have to give us (or referrers or hosts) any information about you which you do not feel comfortable sharing, although this may affect our ability to arrange hosting for you.

You can find out more about what we do with your information and about your rights in our privacy policy, which can be found at the end of this guidance and on our website.

We hope you enjoy your placement and get to know and like your hosts. Many hosts and guests form lasting friendships going well beyond the hosting. Your hosts will be interested in hearing how you get on when you leave them. Do let them know how you are doing even when you have moved on to another placement or a more permanent housing arrangement.

Our privacy policy – How we use your personal information

You can review our privacy policy at www.refugeesathome.org.uk/privacy-policy