



July 26, 2010

Dear AMIGOS Parent:

Congratulations on your son or daughter's participation in AMIGOS this summer! She or he worked very hard to complete the training, fundraising, and participation in an international community service project. We are very proud of each Volunteer and know that you are, too.

Now that the experience is nearing an end, it is time to think a bit about your son or daughter's return home. Every Volunteer experiences a time of readjustment, and the effects of reintegrating are as varied in their nature as the Volunteers themselves. For some, the transition home is smooth and pleasant, and for others, it is rocky. I will try to present both extremes of this transition in this letter in hopes that this will be helpful for you as you mentally prepare for your Volunteer's return home.

What is return cultural adjustment?

Your child has undoubtedly experienced a profound change in his or her perspective and outlook on life, both at home and in Latin America. During training, we focus on the challenge and joy that comes from integrating into to a new culture in Latin America. The cultural adjustment that your Volunteer experienced going into his or her host community in Latin America is not unlike the period of readjustment upon returning home.

Why can re-entry be a challenge?

Your son or daughter has survived and succeeded at one of the most challenging experiences of his or her life so far. It is an experience she or he has shared with only a few people – the partner(s), other AMIGOS Volunteers, the Project Supervisor, and the host community. Your Volunteer's host community is now very far away, as may be the partner and Project Supervisor. Your child may be missing these people and may be feeling that no one at home can really understand what she or he has been through. I want to prepare you that it is very normal for Volunteers to refrain from sharing their experience right away. If this is the case with your child, please know that this is a normal readjustment stage and be patient. When he or she is ready to share, the time will come.

On the other hand, your Volunteer may want to talk about his or her experience all the time. She or he may want to tell you every detail, every name of every member of the host community. In fact, he or she may want to tell you entirely more than you really want to know. Your child may describe many experiences and emotions that you feel you don't really understand. However, you or your Volunteer's closest friends and family may be just the people who can help him or her readjust to the home community life. You are the people who know him or her best, and you can be his or her greatest support.

Why might the transition be a challenge for you?

You might feel frustrated at not fully understanding what your Volunteer has just experienced. It may seem very foreign and unusual. Or you may have had similar experiences yourself but reacted in a different way. Everyone's readjustment period is unique. This may be further complicated if your child is being reclusive or not really wanting to share everything right away. You will certainly notice some changes in his or her outlook, maturity level, attitude, or perspective, and this may be difficult to fully understand.

Also, it is normal that many Volunteers romanticize their summer experience and think that life in Latin America was better than here in their home community. They may be critical of North American values, materialism, and lifestyles. They may be critical of home life and customs in the U.S. On the other hand, your Volunteer may be overjoyed at returning to the comforts of home. She or he will certainly recognize and appreciate many aspects of home life now that she or he has had another experience. And you may be delighted to know that your son or daughter now knows people in a different country who consider him or her a member of their own family.

What can you do to ease the transition?

Recognize that the transition home presents challenges for both of you. Give it time and patience. Respect the changes and know that the changes are positive. Trust that with time, all of this will begin to make more sense than it does now. Don't force him or her to talk about the experience if it feels uncomfortable. Listen to each other and ask genuine questions.

Encourage your Volunteer to communicate with his or her host family by writing letters or sending them copies of photos. If the host family has a phone, they would probably love a phone call once in awhile. Encourage your son or daughter to communicate with his or her partner(s) or other AMIGOS Volunteers in town or at school. Staying connected with the people who shared the experience may help. Encourage him or her to write about the experiences and reflect in whatever way works best. Becoming engaged in community or volunteer work within your community could provide an excellent way for your child to continue developing the leadership skills and to connect with their home community.

In the past months, your child has experienced being independent, making adult decisions and being seen as a role model and leader. Parental guidance is something she or he has lived without for the past several weeks. This aspect of the transition can be particularly challenging for both of you, as your Volunteer may want to continue to exert his or her independence. It may help to discuss the differences between the summer in Latin America and living at home. Look at positive aspects of both ways of doing things. Find ways you can learn from and appreciate each other.

Another way of easing the transition is to stay involved with AMIGOS. The experiences you and your Volunteer now have can be very valuable for Volunteers and parents who are new to AMIGOS. Your stories can be comforting and informative. Contact your local chapter or the International Office to find out how you and your son or daughter can get involved with recruiting, fundraising, training, or how to apply to be a veteran Volunteer or Project Supervisor. Our website provides information on many ways of staying involved and connected. If you would like to know more about AMIGOS or if there is any way we can be of assistance during this transition, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for sharing your son or daughter with us this summer, and I wish you the best of luck with the transition and I hope you and your family will continue to be an active part of the AMIGOS community!

Sincerely yours,

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