

Guidelines for Youth Exchange Emergencies

Although they are rare, unfortunate emergency situations do occasionally arise during Youth Exchange activities. Preparation for any possibility is an essential part of a Youth Exchange program. How the exchangee's family and the media perceive that the emergency was handled will have a direct impact on the program. The following guidelines outline how to prepare in advance for a possible emergency, the individuals to contact should an emergency occur, and the steps to follow during an emergency.

Each Rotary club hosting a Youth Exchange student should have a small committee to help share the work in the event of a tragedy. Suggested committee members are the host parents, the club Youth Exchange chairperson, the club counselor, and the club president.

Tips for emergency preparedness

- The club counselor should keep the student's passport and airline ticket readily available at all times. Store these items in a safe place so that they can be accessed 24 hours a day if necessary.
- The district chairperson should have copies of the airline ticket and passport should the student be traveling or in case the student's documents are not accessible through the club counselor.
- The district Youth Exchange officer should obtain consent from the student's parents or legal guardians to reissue a student's passport in the case it is lost, stolen, or inaccessible at time of departure.
- The district Youth Exchange chairperson should share with the sponsoring Youth Exchange Officer the student's itinerary and know who will meet the student at the airport upon arrival.
- The sponsoring club should outline who (e.g., club, district, student's parents, a combination of sources) will pay for the student to return to finish the exchange after being evacuated in the case of political or civil unrest.
- The Rotarian counselor and current *host family should know details regarding all of the exchangee's travel plans and should ascertain that these travel plans have been approved by the natural parents/legal guardians of the exchangee*, especially if the exchangee is traveling to another city or country during the exchange.
- The exchangee's parents should issue a written authorization letter (or powers of attorney) naming the host Rotarian counselor, host families, and another Rotarian of the host/receiving club (preferably the host club president), any of whom is to act for the parent in the event of injury or death. This is very important because most government departments and local authorities require it. Some districts have the parents/legal guardians sign a number of parental consent forms separate from the application form to ensure that each host family and counselor has a copy of the form.

The letter mentioned above should also authorize the incurring of:

- Funeral expenses (cost of claiming body, embalming, casket, compliance with legal and government fees, and transportation of casket/body, cremation cost, etc.) to be reimbursed from the insurance policy;
- Expenses of authorized persons (Rotarian counselor and/or host parent) to act on behalf of parent (transportation and hotel charges for travel to place of accident, etc.), to be reimbursed from the insurance policy.

The handling of expenses is important as not every host club can afford to incur such immediate expenses. The ability of the club or district to handle immediate costs can prevent a tragic situation from becoming worse and increasing the agony and anguish of the student's parents. The host Rotarian is committed to treat the exchangee as though he/she is his or her own child and will do everything a natural parent would do. However, if a host Rotarian has to spend a substantial amount of money for immediate needs, other Rotarians may be discouraged from becoming host parents and counselors in the future.

It is therefore recommended that either the host Rotary club or the host Rotary district establish an emergency fund to cover immediate expenses in the event of a tragedy. The insurance money received will reimburse this fund. Many hosting districts require the students to have an emergency fund to assist in the event of an emergency.

When a tragic event occurs, things need to be done quickly. Tasks should be assigned to the various members of the club/district emergency committee. The following people need to be informed immediately:

- Parents/Legal guardians. (In case of death, obtain clear instruction concerning burial, cremation or return of body. Also ask about memorial service. Consideration must be given to the religion of the deceased.)
- Host family, club counselor, and district Youth Exchange chairpersons.
- Host district governor and the governor of the sponsoring district.
- Host Rotary club, for assistance and guidance.*
- Insurance company (and remember to follow up).
- Embassy Officer, to obtain his/her advice.

Procedures to follow when the death of an exchangee occurs:

- Ascertain that the deceased is the exchangee.
- Contact all of the above individuals.
- Check with local police for local regulations and obtain a copy of the police report. Reclaim the deceased's possessions, especially the passport.
- Check with the local hospital and mortuary for the claiming of the body and regarding an autopsy. Obtain the death certificate.
- Contact a local undertaker and embalmer. Ensure that the embalmer possesses an internationally recognized practice license so that the embalmed body may cross national borders. (This is to prevent the spread of disease.) Obtain the embalmer's certificate. Order a suitable casket and arrange transportation to exchangee's home country, or arrange for burial or cremation, according to the parents' wishes.
- Obtain the "sealing certificate." For the casket to cross national borders, the inside must be metal-lined and sealed. Sealing must be officially witnessed, to prevent smuggling. In order for a sealed casket to leave the country, an export permit is required. For the sealed casket to enter the exchangee's home country, an import permit is required. An established undertaker should be able to deal with these matters. The embassy can assist in obtaining the two permits.
- Appoint a reputable air-transport agent to airlift the casket to the exchangee's home country. This is to ensure that all connecting flights are correctly scheduled without risk of the casket being accidentally off-loaded at an intermediate airport. The arrival flight details should be correctly passed to the deceased's parents so that they can make arrangements to receive the casket. Give copies of the death certificate, embalming certificate, casket sealing certificate, import and export permits, and passport to the transport company and must accompany the casket on the airplane.
- Hold a memorial service for the exchangee.

Remember to write a complete report to your district governor. Send copies to Rotary International and to the exchangee's home district and Rotary club.

** If accident occurs away from the host area, you may want to contact a local Rotary club for assistance and guidance.*