

# HIGH SCHOOL IN GERMANY

## STUDENT HANDBOOK



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# 1. Welcome to the GLS High School Program

We hope you will enjoy your time with us in Germany and that you will learn many new things about the country, its people and about yourself.

With this manual we want to help you to prepare for the exciting time ahead. We have tried to answer the most frequent questions that arise before departure and address any issues that might be worrying you. Take some time to read it at home and bring it to Germany with you for future reference.

## 1.1 What is an exchange program?

An exchange program is not a holiday or a cheap way of learning a language, neither is it a convenient way of travelling around Europe (although at some point it might feel like some or all of these things). The main idea of an exchange program is making new experiences and exchanging cultural values between the host family and the student. Learning the language will be a first step in overcoming the obstacles ahead but understanding the differences and the variety in your host culture can help overcome obstacles like prejudices or false expectations.

Not everybody is fit for a long stay abroad. After analysing your application documents, we feel that you are. You, on the other hand, might still be having doubts. Here are some questions to ask yourself to make sure you "have what it takes":

### Have realistic expectations!

Have you obtained first-hand information about Germany, from the media, from friends, from former exchange students? Keep an open mind and make your own experiences. Let things happen to you and don't take anything for granted.

### Take things with humor!

Can you laugh about situations and about yourself, even when things are not going the way you wanted them to or when you are angry? A good dose of humor helps you to cope better with many unfamiliar situations.

### Be able to communicate!

Do you talk about your feelings? Do you think you are capable of openly talking with your teachers, your host family or your GLS tutor when you are feeling lonely, homesick, unpopular or self-conscious?

### Be tolerant!

Are you tolerant and able to be patient with yourself and the people you meet? Settling in is a process for everyone involved. Embrace differences!

### Adapt yourself!

Are you good at observing and adapting to unfamiliar living conditions? Try to fit into your new environment and try out new things, but still be yourself.

### Let go and be independent!

Are you ready to free yourself from your parents and solve challenges on your own or seek help from the people around you?



## 1.2 What does your program include?

What you've booked so far:

- placement at a high school (public or private)
- host family / boarding accommodation with full board (at home)
- transfer on official arrival date from the nearest airport or station to the accommodation
- supervision by a member of GLS staff
- provision of all necessary information and guidance
- school reports or certificate of attendance issued by the German high school
- a certificate of participation, issued by GLS
- help with all questions and problems from GLS office Berlin and the respective local coordinators
- activities with other GLS students, offered by the local coordinator
- health and liability insurance

Further expenses might be:

- pocket money – about 150€ - 200€ per month
- costs for activities/trips made with the host family
- school books and other supplies
- expenses for public transport services
- residence permit
- transfer to the nearest airport/train station upon departure
- online language course in a small group (1 afternoon/week)
- Berlin Weekend (offered twice a year)
- transfer/accommodation for students arriving/leaving outside the fixed program dates will not be organized, paid or supervised by GLS

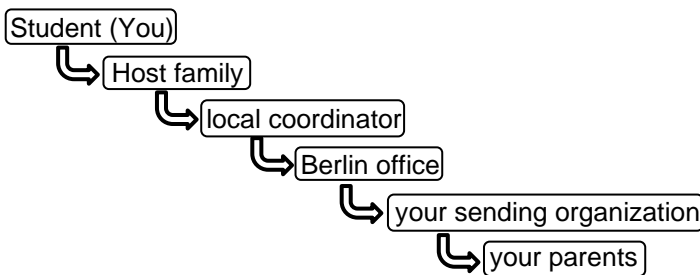


## 2. Your high school coordinators

Each student is assigned a local coordinator who is responsible for your well-being. You can contact them if you need to discuss a problem. For the contact information on your local coordinator please see the next page.

Please also remember that the GLS staff is always there for you if you feel like you need someone to talk to! You'll find us in the office Monday till Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. We care about you and want to know how you are doing! If you have questions or need help do not hesitate to contact us. We are looking forward to hearing from you.

### The GLS chain of communication:



## Your local coordinators in Berlin and Brandenburg

**Alisa Aldinger**  
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 (+49 30) 78 00 89 749



**Anna Baumann**  
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**GLS office WhatsApp**  
**+49 178 02659225**

GLS High School Germany  
 24/25  
 WhatsApp-Gruppe



**Emergency numbers after 5 pm and on weekends**

**Ambulance Service:** 112

**Police:** 110

**GLS reception:** +49 30 7800890 0

**Reception Hotel Oderberger:** +49 30 780089 760 (24 hours)

## Your local coordinators outside Berlin

### BREMEN

**Falaat Farho** (PractiGo Agency)  
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+49 151 65 02 98 94



### DARMSTADT

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### DRESDEN

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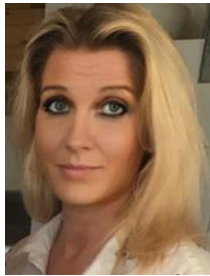
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### KOBLENZ

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### NÜRNBERG

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### ULM

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Should you not be placed in any of the above cities/regions, please view the staff from the Berlin office as your coordinators.

Remember to save both, your host family's and your coordinator's telephone number in your phone and to always carry your home address with you, particularly in the beginning!

Once all the students destined to your region have arrived, the local coordinator will organize an orientation get-together to go through some organisational issues and to give you a chance to meet all participants and exchange contact details.

Twice a year, in spring and fall, we also offer a weekend in Berlin for all exchange students in Germany at an additional cost. That is a great opportunity to get to know the other students and spend a fun and exciting weekend in the capital of Germany with the opportunity to share experiences and to talk to others who might be experiencing the same insecurities.

Students placed in Berlin can also take part in the weekly activity program for adult language course students, with sightseeing and excursions to neighboring cities. The meeting point will usually be the campus. If you are on campus, you might want to drop in to see your coordinator. We are always happy to hear from you and find out how you are getting on! You will find us in house 3 on the first floor.

### **3. Host family**

By now, you will have heard a lot about how to adapt to life in a foreign family. One of the main bits of advice you will have heard over and over again might be: try to behave like you were just another member of the family. Easier said than done. After all, you are a stranger in an unknown family. The only way to overcome this is to stop being a stranger by getting to know your "new relatives". Please bear in mind that while you are adapting to them, they are also adapting to having a new member in the family.

#### **3.1**

Spend time with your family. At the beginning, it might be tempting to go hide in your room and facetime or to hang out only with other exchange or language students. However, it is during mealtimes, during trips to the supermarket or by attending Oma Brigitte's birthday that you will get to build up a relationship with your hosts and feel increasingly confident around them.

This does not mean, of course, that you are not entitled to your private space and to taking time-out when you need it (after all, talking in a foreign language can be quite exhausting). On the contrary, you might find that rather the opposite is the case, that the members of your new family might spend more time on their own or doing silent activities than you are used to from home. It will take some time, but you will get used to these differences in behavior. If this or anything else bothers you, try talking to your host family or to your local coordinator.

Don't be afraid to ask if you are not sure how things work in the family (at what times they eat, what time you're supposed to be home in the evening, how you should go about washing your clothes), just ask. This will not only make it easier for you to avoid misunderstandings and to integrate in the family's life, it will also show them you respect and care for their way of life... and you will practise your German.

If you can't find the right words, use universal gestures such as offering help with small chores, or with preparing a meal.

Likewise, your family will need to get to know you. Give them a chance. Tell them about how things are different (or similar) in your country. Avoid however, unnecessary criticism of German culture – remember, things are rarely better or worse, just different. Show them pictures of and tell them about your family or friends. Explain a bit more about your hobbies. You might want to cook a typical dish from your country for your family to break the ice.

### 3.2

Please do your best to integrate into the German host family. This includes, among other things, the participation in family activities, being present at family meals, helping with the household and building positive relations with the host brothers and sisters and other family members. You should treat the host family politely and show an interest in their lives. You will have to respect the authority of the host family regarding curfew, appointments, inviting guests over and household duties.

#### **There are certain rules you will have to abide by when living in a host family:**

- Be on time! Always. If they ask you to be somewhere at a certain time, be there exactly at that certain time. It could be that you realize after some time, that your hosts are not as punctual as the stereotype suggests, and then you can adjust to that. However, for the beginning, just be punctual.
- Please do not take unduly long showers. Switch off the light and turn down the heating in your room when leaving the house.
- You are not allowed to access websites with pornographic and extreme violent content or to watch films with this content, even if your parents do not have any objection to this. This is regarded as uncalled-for and offensive during your stay in Germany.
- You should display caution when displaying personal information or pictures on social media (e.g. Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat) to avoid damaging the privacy of the host family or other people. Publishing contents that are obscene, defamatory, menacing or aimed at damaging the reputation of other people can lead to premature exclusion from the exchange program.
- Please note that smoking and drinking alcohol is prohibited by German law resp. GLS rules.
- Your host family is responsible for providing food for you and should cook regularly and at least once a day. It is, however, common in Germany to have one cold meal a day, generally in the evening, consisting of salad, bread, cheese and cold cuts. If you are hungry in between meals, feel free to tell your family, but don't help yourself to food without asking first.
- Please note that your host family is not obligated to give you access to their home Wi-Fi. However, most of them will do so. You might be able to occasionally use your host's computer, but they don't have to let you, especially not for long stretches of time.

- Ask if it is okay for you to bring friends over and make sure you speak German with them in front of your host family. The opposite is perceived as being rude.
- Tell your hosts where you are going and who you are going with (if they are not home when you leave, please leave a note). Come back home by the time they tell you to (even if at home you are allowed to stay out longer). If for some special reason, you want to stay out a bit longer, ask for permission before going out (not late in the evening). Don't feel these rules as an imposition, but rather as a sign that your host family cares for your safety. After all, they feel responsible towards your parents for your wellbeing.
- Make sure that all parties understand the expectations of living together. Find out how your host family feels about you serving yourself food from their kitchen or preparing your own meals. Assumptions are the basis of so many misunderstandings and conflicts, so rather than guessing, talk!
- What happens if you break something? Please don't try to hide it from your host family or to repair it by yourself. Accidents can happen, and if you were not behaving irresponsible, your family will understand. Before coming to Germany, you will have had to obtain an insurance, which will in most cases, cover the costs of repair or reposition. Until the claim has been processed, though, your parents back home will have to pay for the damages.
- When you are ill and need to see a doctor, you will have to show your health insurance proof and pay directly in cash/card or later by bank transfer after getting the invoice.

It is unlikely that you will go through a stay abroad without experiencing some problem or conflict with your host family. Whatever it is, talk about it with them, or, if this does not help to solve the problem, talk to your local coordinator or the GLS Coordinators in Berlin.

As time passes and you become more comfortable with your hosts, the "rules" and formalities will likely loosen, but always bear in mind that they will look at you as an extension of their own family, so your behavior and appearance around town and in school will reflect on them as well. In other words, behave yourself!

A change of host family will only be made if the problems become very severe and no solution can be found despite all efforts and discussions. Then the GLS coordinators will help you find another host family, which may take some time.

**No reasons to change your host family are:**

- Family supposedly lives too far away
- Host family does not make excursions
- Student must be home early, not allowed to go to parties or to travel
- Host parents are too strict
- There are no host siblings
- Stricter use of resources



## 4. School

Regular school attendance in Germany is mandatory and you will be expected to respect the school rules and comply with the academic requirements. It will no doubt be difficult for you to keep up with the lessons in a foreign language, and your teachers will be understanding and make allowances for this challenge.

However, you will have to have a go at doing your homework and projects and take exams like any other student. Also, ask teachers and coordinators at school for the rules (leaving campus, absence, illness, etc.).

This is particularly important if you are trying to obtain grades for the school year abroad. Getting good grades is a very big challenge indeed, and you should talk to your school back home about their requirements. It might be enough if you provide a certificate of attendance, based on effort and attendance, rather than on performance. Even if this is the case, you still need to take exams and participate in class projects and do homework.

You might find that your classmates in Germany are quite reserved at first. As with your host family, you have to give them the time and opportunity to get to know you. The class dynamics might also be different to what you are used to, students might speak more or less than they do in your home country. Likewise, there might be stricter or more relaxed rules regarding behavior and dress code. Whichever might be the case, observe how your classmates behave and try to adapt to your new environment.

During your time in Germany, you will probably want to explore the country and visit some of its famous cities and monuments. While GLS supports this, please bear in mind that travelling is only allowed with your host family, during school holidays, or in trips organised by GLS, if you have written permission from your parents (travel agreement) and if you do not miss any classes or school days. You should never travel on your own.

In case you are ill, you must inform the school secretary in the morning of the very same day and if your absence lasts longer than 3 days, you have to see a doctor and show a medical certificate when going back to school.

Depending on the distance from your host family to your school you might have to walk or use the public transportation (after the first couple of days). Most German students are very independent and are not brought to school by their parents. The distance to school might be a little bit longer than you are used to from home, especially in bigger cities like Berlin. The travel duration from one part of the city to another might take up to 60 minutes. But don't worry, we always try to find host families nearby your school, so your commute won't be too long.

Be aware that you are a guest. You will be very welcome as long as you show interest, motivation and respect. Your behavior will have an impact on the schools that you visit and pave the way for future exchange students.

Please remember to ask your host school to give you the certificate before returning to your home country. After departure it is very difficult to obtain such a certificate from the respective host school. If you need to have your certificate legalized for use in your home country, please let the GLS team know in time and send or bring the original certificate to the GLS office in Berlin.

## 5. Money matters

Not too much and not too little, that is the best advice we can give you on pocket money. Each individual has different needs and expectations and it is difficult to say exactly the amount you will need. Based on our experience we calculate you will definitely need 150-200€ a month. Half of that will be pocket money for your personal expenses (toiletries etc.) and the rest will go towards school and leisure related expenses (lunch in the school cafeteria, textbooks, stationary, clothes, sim cards, etc.)

It is advisable that you bring a larger amount of money for the first weeks (cash or card) and that your parents transfer you money regularly after that. A more comfortable option is that you travel with your family credit card. Your parents might want to discuss with their issuing bank whether there are ways of limiting the amount spent.

## 6. Going out and other rules

Every culture has different ideas of what fun and going out is. In order to avoid problems and headaches you should comply with the German law and with the GLS program rules. Drugs are not tolerated and their use will mean an immediate cancellation of the program. As a guest in this country you will be expected to respect the local rules. Moreover, your behavior will reflect on the image of your homeland in Germany and misbehavior might have unexpected consequences for people you care for and who support you in this program (host family, supervisor, school...).

The opportunity to spend an extended period of time abroad with a host family and in a foreign school is an exciting challenge. Not only will you get the chance to learn more about the German culture, but you will also learn new things about yourself. A major part of an exchange is development. The changes you undergo during the program will leave traces after you go back home. A positive attitude and a great deal of humor (towards new but also less pleasant experiences) will help you make the best of your stay.

Homesickness is very normal for all exchange students. The best medicine is distraction and involving yourself with your new environment. Go talk to your host family, have game nights, meet up with new friends or explore the area. Rather be active than locking yourself up in your room. Should you wish to join any clubs in your area (volleyball, chess, horse riding, etc.) it is best to ask your host parents for help as they are experts in the area.

If you have a problem, please always talk to the people who are affected first. Open communication avoids misunderstandings, and many things can be clarified directly through open discussions.

Even if you prefer to talk to your birth parents first in case of difficulties, at the end of all chains of contact there is always a conversation with the local caregiver. It is therefore easier, faster and sometimes also more honest if you confide directly in the coordinator and start the conversation yourself.

## 7. GLS Community

We are one big family here at GLS and we are looking forward to you becoming part of our family! There are several ways we stay in touch with each other and we would like to invite you to join.

First, please join the **GLS High School Community**: [www.high-school-community.de](http://www.high-school-community.de). This is a platform where all GLS students get together to share their experiences and meet each other. Once you have registered and created your account, you may also become a writer for us! You can write a photo story about your time in Germany and earn 30€ for it. It's super easy and fun!

You will find all the instructions for writing a photo story here:

<https://www.high-school-community.de/de/stories/sei-unser-auslandskorrespondent>

Second, make sure to **follow us on social media**:



<https://de-de.facebook.com/GLS.Highschool>



[@gls\\_teens\\_worldwide](https://www.instagram.com/gls_teens_worldwide)



[@gls\\_teens\\_worldwide](https://www.tiktok.com/@gls_teens_worldwide)

This is where we share our stories, photos and exciting news about high school life in Germany and abroad.

## We wish you a great stay in Germany!

