

THE GULF ISLANDS INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PROGRAM (GIISP)

Student Handbook 2024-2025

August 2024 Update



"Imagine a place where...you are part of something special."



Gulf Islands International Program

General Program Information, Rules, and Expectations for All Students

Current Rules in British Columbia Regarding Covid-19

British Columbia, the province where Salt Spring Island is located, no longer has Covid-19 restrictions in place. This means wearing masks in public indoor settings is not required by public health and it is a personal choice if one wears a mask. Masks are encouraged on public transit and BC Ferries, but not required. Even though life is returning to “normal”, it is important that we respect the choices of people, businesses, and one another regarding the choosing to wear a mask or not.

Important Rules for GIIP Students:

- **Travel:** if you wish to travel outside of Salt Spring Island, you will need to submit a Travel Authorization. For Victoria, this only needs to be done once with your natural parents' permission and then going forward it will be up to your homestay to allow you to go. For safety reasons, we ask that you travel with a friend and not on your own. Forms can be found hanging by the international team's office door. Please also be aware of weather conditions, ferry cancellations and to make sure you always catch a ferry back that is NOT the last one of the day.
- **Sleepovers:** If you are interested in a sleepover at another home on the weekend (Thursday, Friday or Saturday night), a sleepover authorization form must be submitted to the International office either by email or in person, prior to the sleepover. **If the sleepover is NOT with a GIISP host family...** Please discuss the details of your sleepover with your host family and fill out the sleepover authorization form and sign it and have your natural parent sign it and your host family sign it. **If the sleepover is with a GIISP host family**, you do not need to hand in a form, however do make sure your homestay is aware of the sleepover and the arrangements. Forms can be found hanging by the international team's office door.
- **Alcohol and drugs:** all GIISP students are strictly prohibited from drinking alcohol or consuming drugs during their stay here, regardless of your age or what the rules are in your home country, it is against the law in Canada.
- **Smoking/vaping:** all GIISP students are strictly prohibited from smoking and/or vaping any substance.
- **Driving:** GIISP students are not allowed to drive a motorized vehicle during their stay here, nor can they obtain a driver's license. This is not covered by our insurance.
- **School:** GIISP students are required to follow the school code of conduct, school rules, attend school regularly, complete homework assignments and maintain a satisfactory level of academic achievement.
- **Break the Law:** if GIISP students break the law, they will be dismissed from the program as it is a violation of their study permit and/or their permission to study in Canada.



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- **Safety:**
 - **Hitchhiking** is not allowed; we need to make sure you remain safe.
 - **Swimming, when** in our lakes or ocean, it is expected you have a responsible adult with you to make sure you are safe. Please make sure you have shared with the adult your level of swimming capabilities, such as, are you a strong swimmer.
 - **Trampoline** usage is considered a high-risk activity and we ask you not to use them.
 - **Parties**, if you are to attend one, it is expected there will be a responsible adult over the age of 25 years, present at the party. Please share with your host parent, the name and phone number of the responsible adult, and address where the party will be.
 - **Walking** during the fall and winter seasons can be dangerous, as it gets dark early, and it isn't safe to be walking the streets as there are no streetlights and in many areas of the island, no sidewalks. If you are required to walk home, please make sure you are home prior to it getting dark.
 - **E-bikes** may be ridden during daylight hours by students 16 years or older. A proper fitting helmet must be worn.

School Bus and Public Transportation

- **School Bus:** Gulf Islands School District has a school bus system. However, some of our students prefer to use Public Transportation. When you have arrived, please check with your host family regarding your School Bus Pass and to make sure you are registered to ride the school bus.
- **Public Transportation:** Salt Spring Island Transit System is the public transportation service in our area. To find bus schedules, fares and where to buy bus cards, please visit, [Salt Spring Island Transit System](#). Your host family can also help you with this, so don't hesitate to ask them for more information!

Forms Requiring a Parent Signature

- School forms that require a parent's signature for school related activities can be signed by your homestay or one of the international department staff.
- Forms for activities that are outside the school must be signed by your natural parents.
- Local gym membership forms or waivers for community activities are to be signed by your natural parents. Please let us know if you need assistance scanning the document and we can help.

Homestay Information and Expectations

Your host family is a very important part of your stay here in Canada. Our host families are wonderful families who are eager to give you a fantastic experience. Of course, as you will be joining a family that is different from your own, there will be new things, rituals, and family traditions to get used to. The information in this section is to help you establish a strong relationship with your host family and avoid any unnecessary issues.



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The two most important things – Integration and Communication

Integration:

Trying to be part of the family is an important responsibility you have while you are here. Your host family will appreciate it when you:

- Engage in conversations
- Talk about your home and country
- Are home for meals - dinner (especially Sunday – Thursday) is a great time to connect with your host family
- If your host family invites you to activities, you should go!

Communication:

Communication is the key to building trust and respect with your host family as they are responsible for you and are your parents while you are here.

It is your responsibility to make sure your family knows where you are always, as this is an expectation of our program. Ask your host family if they prefer you to text or phone to let them know where you are. **Please clearly communicate the following details, whether it be by texting or on the phone:**

- Where you are and where you are going
- Who you are with
- When you will be home
- Let them know if your plans have changed
- Let them know ahead of time if you are going to miss dinner
- *Example: I'm on the {bus number} bus, heading to Ganges with {friend's names} and going to go for dinner at {name of restaurant}. I'm now at the restaurant. I'm now on the {bus number} bus and will be home at {time}. Please respond to your host family in a timely manner, especially when they ask you to clarify or ask you to provide more information.*

When wanting to go out or prior to making plans with friends, it is polite to ask your host parents if it's okay with them, instead of telling them what you will be doing. Example, if you are wanting to go out for dinner, hang out with your friends or be absent for dinner, ask your host if they are okay with your plans.

Please note, cell phone service on the island can sometimes have inconsistent service, with weak or no connection, so it is most important to be sharing with your host family what your plans are prior to leaving home. You may need to ask a friend who uses a different cell provider to send a message to your host on your behalf. Remember it is your responsibility to make sure your host family knows where you are at all times. **Please make sure your phone battery is fully charged prior to heading out. This is not an acceptable reason for not keeping in contact with your host family. A portable phone charger may be helpful for you if you know your phone battery won't last all day.**



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Everyday Important Things

Food:

- Talk to your host family about the foods you like and dislike.
- Go grocery shopping with them and show them what you would like.
- Talk to your host family about breakfast and lunch preparation.
- Share recipes from your home and country.
- Be home for dinner often.
- Be open to trying new foods.
- It's ok to politely let them know if you don't like something after you have tried it.

Manners:

Canadians are considered very polite and say "please" and "thank you" a lot. You are expected to adopt these habits while you are here. If you are unsure about how to be polite in a situation just ask, your host will be happy to tell you. For example, even though host parents are expected to make dinner for you, it is customary to thank the cook for the meal and let them know that you enjoyed it.

Showers, Laundry, Chores

Showers:

- Limit the length of time for your daily shower to 5 minutes. This is especially important as many homes use wells for their water source. Historically, Salt Spring is on water restrictions from June to September so during those months you need to be extra diligent.
- Make sure you put the shower curtain inside the shower before starting the water.
- Clean up any water that may get on the floor.
- You may have a shower each day.
- Please take your shower before your host family is in bed sleeping.
 - *Please speak to your host parent regarding length of time for a shower, as it may differ due to the water source at your homestay.*

Laundry:

- Your host family will let you know how they would like to handle the laundry.
- Some will want to do your laundry for you and others will teach you how to do your own laundry.
- Laundry is not to be done late at night.



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Chores:

Each homestay is different so make sure you discuss what chores you are expected to do. Most homestays will ask students to:

- Help with the dishes
- Make your own bed and tidy your own bedroom
- Clean up after yourself in the kitchen and common areas
- Some homestays will expect students to:
 - Clean the student bathroom
 - Do your own laundry

Heating and Lights:

- Families in British Columbia keep their homes quite cool; 20 degrees is normal for us.
- Some host families will allow students to have the heat in their rooms at a higher temperature, but they must turn the heat down when they are not in the room. Please speak to your host family regarding this.
- If the heat is on, please do not open windows, as the heat will escape.
- Please turn the lights and heat off when you are not in your room.

Computer and Internet Use:

- Minimize the amount of downloading that you do. Host families may have to pay extra if you download too much, there is a limit per household.
- At 10:00 pm, usually quiet time, it is time to stop gaming and skypeing, so you do not disturb the family members while they are trying to sleep. This also allows you the time to settle down for sleep.

Cell Phones:

Having a cell phone can assist you in keeping in contact with your host family. You can look into getting a month-to-month cell phone plan to use while you are here. Phonebox is a company for students that do not require a contract. Please do not ask your host family to sign a cell phone contract, but rather ask for their assistance or come see us in the international office for help. We also have PhoneBox SIM cards available for you in the international office, or you can sign up online.

- More information regarding Phonebox can be found at: <https://gophonebox.com>



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Medical Insurance, Health, and Wellbeing:

If you need assistance or support, please speak with your host parent or with the GIISP Team.

StudyInsured™ Emergency Medical Insurance

All students will be enrolled into StudyInsured™'s Comprehensive+ Plan while they study in our program. This insurance is designed to cover expenses related to unexpected illnesses or injuries. Routine care/check-ups/prescriptions for pre-existing conditions are not covered. Unforeseen medical emergencies related to pre-existing conditions are eligible so long as the student has been compliant with their medications/treatments/medical guidance. All claims are processed according to the benefits, conditions, limitations, and exclusions of the policy wording.

studyinsured™

Helpful StudyInsured™ Links + QR Code

www.studyinsured.com/gulfislandsisp

[Comprehensive+ Plan Full Policy Wording](#)

[Virtual Health Information](#) (ideal for minor illnesses)

[Student Member Portal](#) (students must register for portal access)

StudyInsured™ Assistance

- For emergency situations or to see a doctor in person, our students can visit the local hospital, **Lady Minto/Gulf Islands Hospital** located at **135 Crofton Rd, Salt Spring Island**.

Important Note!

In the event of a serious illness or injury, someone must call StudyInsured™ Assistance as soon as possible to ensure a case is open.

StudyInsured™ Assistance
24/7 Multilingual Case Management
1.866.883.9787



Failure to open a case may result in eligible claims only being paid to 80%.

Mental Health Support

StudyInsured™'s Stay Healthy at School program connects students to qualified mental health professionals 24/7 in more than 100 languages by phone



[Link to Quick Reference Guide](#)

Stay Healthy at School
24/7 Multilingual Mental Health Support
1.833.646.1524





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Challenges with Your Host Family?

Adjusting to life in a “new family” may take a while and you can expect that both you and your host family will need some time to get used to each other and to establish a relationship. Open communication with your host family is very important! Please remember your host family is likely very different from your own family back home and will view things differently than you do. As long as both you and your host family are respectful about differing views, this doesn't have to be an issue.

If you feel your placement with your host family is not working out, there are a few steps you should take:

1. **Talk to your host family:** when an issue arises with your host family, the first step should always be to talk to them about this. Many times, a host family might not even be aware there is an issue. If they don't know, they can't make changes to make you feel better!
2. **Contact Sheri Wakefield:** Come by the International Office located in the Counselling area or email Sheri at swakefield@sd64.org
3. **Meeting with Host Family and Homestay Coordinator:** if, after using the strategies Sheri and or the Homestay Coordinator gave you, the situation is still not improving, your Homestay Coordinator may organize and mediate a meeting with you and your host family to discuss the issue and see if there are any possible solutions. This opportunity usually assists with resolving the situation.
4. **Potential Change of Host Families:** if, after all the previous efforts, there isn't positive progress and the issue persists, you may request a move to a different host family with your Homestay Coordinator. Your Homestay Coordinator will assess the situation and make a final decision based on you and your host family's efforts to resolve the issue, as well as the availability of another suitable host family. This will take time to arrange.

Important note: A casual request to change host families without any efforts to improve the situation will not be considered. Students will not be moved immediately and without discussion with the host family first, unless there is an emergency, or the student is not safe.



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Appendix 1: Gulf Islands International Program – Contact Information

If you have questions or concerns regarding your Homestay, please contact Sue Kernaghan, Homestay Coordinator.

For any questions or concerns regarding school and courses, your first point of contact is your teacher, the International Program Counsellor at the school, or the International Program Managing Director. They're also able to assist you with other questions, by directing you to the person who has the answer and can help. They're at your school to help you! Don't hesitate to go to talk to them!

Gulf Islands International Student Program Team

Staff	Title	Phone	Email
Dan Sparanese	District Principal		dsparanese@sd64.org
Sheri Wakefield	International Program Managing Director	250-537-9944 ext. 1203 Cell: 250-537-6720	swakefield@sd64.org
Sue Kernaghan	Homestay Coordinator	250-221-0208	sue.kernaghan@shaw.ca
Nia Williams	International Program Counsellor	250-537-9944 ext. 1212	nwilliams@sd64.org
Chelsa England	International Student Program Assistant	250-537-9944 ext. 1218	cengland@sd64.org

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Medical Emergencies

24/7 StudyInsured™ Assistance → 1.866.883.9787

Mental Health Support

24/7 Stay Healthy at School Program → 1.833.646.1524