

Facilities in a typical UK home



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Your room

You will be given a key to the house but you will not normally be given a key to your room, as it is not usual to lock bedroom doors in a private home. The host is responsible for keeping your room clean but you are responsible for making your bed and keeping your room tidy.

If you wish to move furniture in your room or put pictures on the wall, please ask the host family first. Please do not use drawing pins, glue or sticky tape on walls or furniture and be careful with shoe polish and nail varnish. If you break or damage anything, tell your host family immediately and be prepared to pay for the cost of replacements or repairs. Please ask before using any of your own electrical equipment. You can buy electrical adaptors in many shops, but please note that UK voltage is 240V. It's OK to listen to music in your room, but don't play it too loud. Be careful with furniture and other objects in the room. If anything breaks, tell the host family immediately. Offer to pay if you are responsible.

If you want to bring friends home, ask your host first. If you go to your room, be considerate. Do not make a lot of noise as this may disturb other members of the family.

The living room

This is where many families relax, read the newspapers, watch television, and entertain their friends. Some people call it the 'sitting room' or 'lounge'. Family members may have their favourite armchairs.



Part of the living room may be a dining area. Some houses have a separate dining room. Some families eat most of their meals in the kitchen, but use the dining or living room on special occasions. Sometimes people eat while watching television if a favourite programme is on at the same time.

- Find out if family members have favourite chairs or armchairs.
- Use the chairs you are offered.
- Don't put your feet up on the furniture.
- Always ask if you want to turn on the television or change the channel.
- If you read books or newspapers, put them away tidily when you have finished.
- If you eat or have a drink in the living room, always take the cups, plates and cutlery to the kitchen when you have finished.

The dining area

Mealtimes, especially evening meals, are opportunities to talk. Your hosts may be interested in what you have done, seen and learnt. Don't miss this opportunity. Ask them about anything new, unusual or strange that you have seen or heard. This is usually a good time to ask them questions and practise your English.

- It is important to be on time for meals. If you are going to be late, phone and explain. Your hosts will keep a meal for you. Tell your hosts if you will be eating somewhere else that day.
- Don't sit in someone else's favourite chair. Ask which chair you should sit in.
- It is polite to wait until everyone has their food

before starting to eat. There is no special word or phrase that everyone says before eating. Your host may say something like 'Please start' or 'Do begin'.

- However, it is not rude to be the only person eating, so you do not have to stop when everyone else has finished.
- Be considerate. Pass things like salt and pepper, bread and butter, when people need them.
- Use a napkin if you have one. Spread it on your lap. You can use it to wipe your lips and fingers when necessary. British people don't use a hot towel to wipe their hands at the table.
- When you have finished, place your knife and fork side by side on your plate. Fold the napkin and place it beside the plate.
- You do not have to eat everything on your plate, but it is polite to eat most of it.
- Always offer to help clear the table. Take things into the kitchen area until the table is clear. Men and women, boys and girls help with this in most families.

Language tip

When you don't know people very well, two very useful words when making requests or offers are 'could' and 'would'. Could you pass the butter, please? Could I have some bread? Would you like some orange juice?

Study tips

Notice how people make requests or offers in English. Write down some examples in your notebook.

Can you tell how well these people know each other?

Are some people more direct to each other? Why is this?

What language would you use to make requests or offers to different English speakers you know?

In what ways are table manners different in Britain? Observe and make notes. Your host family may not be typical, so observe other people in cafeterias and restaurants. Are there any manners you like or dislike? Write down what they are and why.

The kitchen

Some families eat most of their meals in the kitchen. They only eat in the dining or living room on special occasions. There will usually be a washing machine and there might be a dishwasher. In some homes there will be separate areas for cleaning materials and equipment for doing the laundry (washing clothes). These are often called utility rooms. There may be a separate larder or cupboard for storing some food.

Ask your host what you may or may not do in the kitchen. Usually you will be allowed to make hot drinks and snacks by yourself, but don't take food from the cupboards or fridge without asking first. Keep the kitchen clean and tidy. If you have a drink or a snack, put glasses, cups and plates away when you have finished.

A very important item in most British kitchens is the electric kettle. This boils water for tea and coffee. Teabags and instant coffee are very popular because they are quick and convenient. On the other hand, your hosts may prefer to make tea in a teapot. They may make coffee in a filter machine, a percolator or an espresso machine. Offer to wash up or dry the dishes after a meal. Both males and females do this in Britain. In Britain, people don't always rinse the dishes with clean water after they have washed them. Some families have a dishwasher. Offer to help load or unload the machine when necessary. Put things back in cupboards and drawers in the places where you found them. If you drop or spill anything, clean it up.

Always ask what to use for the cleaning. Don't forget to put things back in the fridge and cupboards when you have finished with them.

The bathroom

Most British homes only have one bathroom so you will share a bathroom with the rest of the family. It is important to know the house rules or customs about using the bathroom. For example, in the mornings, people usually have a routine. That is, they use the bathroom at about the same time every morning before having breakfast and going off to work.

You can have a bath or shower each day. If you do not understand how the equipment works, please

ask your host to explain. Remember to leave the bathroom clean and tidy for the next person to use. The host family will give you a towel if you do not have your own but you will be expected to use your own toiletries, i.e. shampoo, toothpaste, etc.

You can ask your hosts what times are best for you to use the bathroom for a shower or bath. Again, the most important rules are to be considerate and sensitive to other people's needs at all times.

How do people in Britain keep clean?

Some people wash using soap, a flannel or a sponge. They may take a shower, especially if they don't have much time. Other times, they might take a hot bath. This is often used as a method of relaxation. Some people have a quick shower after their bath.

Using the bathroom

Ask about hot water: in many homes the British heat water as they need it, to save electricity, gas or oil. In some homes they use a timer to heat the water at fixed times.

Many bathrooms have separate hot and cold taps. Be careful! The water can get very hot from one and very cold from the other.

Try not to waste water. Some homes have a water meter, and families have to pay for the amount of water they use.

Many British bathrooms have carpets or mats on the floor. Some bathrooms have mats to protect the floor or carpet from water. Use these in the same way as your hosts. Try to keep the floor dry: don't fill the bath up to the top and remember to keep the shower curtain inside the bath tub.



Only use your own towel in the bathroom, and ask your host family where you should put it to dry. Don't leave it on the floor - remember you're not in a hotel!

Rinse out the bath and basin - leave them clean for the next person. Try to leave the floor dry. Ask your host family where to keep your toiletries, and be careful not to leave medicines where young children can get them. Remember to lock the bathroom door!

The garden

Many British homes have a garden. There is often a small garden at the front of the house and a larger one at the back. Gardening is a common leisure time activity for many people.

Pets

Pets are popular in Britain - nearly 50% of homes have one. If you don't like pets, tell us in advance so that we can choose a family without pets for you. The most popular pets are fish, cats, dogs, rabbits, budgerigars, hamsters and guinea pigs.

Broadband internet

The vast majority of UK families will have broadband internet at home. However, they may not allow you to use their internet connection for long periods, or to download material.

If you book a course with us of 24 weeks or more, we will give you a free mobile broadband modem pre-loaded with 3GB. You can plug this straight into your laptop for access to internet and email connection anytime, anywhere.

If you are following a shorter course, you can easily buy the modem from college when you arrive.

Heating

Most homes have central heating. This is often turned off during the night. If you feel cold, please ask your host family for extra blankets or additional heating but never leave fires or heaters burning overnight. Electricity is expensive in Britain, so be considerate and switch off the lights when you leave the room.

Laundry

Some host families will be happy to wash your clothes for a small charge, others may let you use their washing machine but some may prefer that you wash your clothes at the launderette. If your host agrees to wash your clothes, you should pay them directly, usually around £5.00 per week.

Friends and visitors

It is polite to ask permission from your host family before inviting friends or visitors to the home. Please do not let your friends (male or female) stay overnight in your bedroom - this is likely to cause offence.

Recycling

You may be surprised at how little is recycled in Britain, but things are getting better! For example, the British now recycle some, but not all, plastic products. Your country probably recycles all kinds of plastic. The usual household items for recycling are glass (bottles and jars), tin cans, and paper (newspapers, magazines, etc.). Check if your family has separate bins for rubbish to be recycled.

