



Conversation Starters When Interacting with International Students

Friendships in any culture are built upon the same foundation: shared experiences and trust. Conversation is often the entry point into developing a trust relationship, and the following questions are suggestions for learning more about your international friend(s)' customs, culture, and family. As you converse, offer insights into your own family and culture when appropriate. Do not pry or force conversation, but be prepared to offer suggestions on what topics to discuss for your time together. It is also fun to exchange pictures of family, special sights from vacation or back home, or other personal interest items. You might also consider topics related to your friend's home country that you get off the Internet.

When it comes to conversation topics, you will find that your international friend may approach issues in a different manner than Americans. While we are taught that some topics to avoid are religion and politics, our international friends are likely open to discussing these. Why? The norms of conversational interaction, including acceptable topics for discussion, vary between cultures.

Customs & Gestures

1. How would you introduce me to your family?
2. What form of greeting would I use?
3. Would I be expected to bring a gift?
4. What would we do after the greeting?
5. What is the polite way to leave a social evening together?
6. What is the most common greeting and farewell in your country?

Education

1. What are some of the differences you have observed between schools in your country and those in this country?
2. How do you plan to use what you have learned here back home?
3. What are the procedures for a student desiring to enter the university in your country?

Food

1. What are your favorite types of foods?
2. Does your family eat together? Do you talk during the meal or keep silent?
3. How would you prepare one of your favorite meals (could we cook it together)?

Leisure Activities

1. What is the most popular sport?
2. What films from here are popular in your country?
3. What kinds of music do you listen to?
4. Are libraries available in your cities? Are they free, or is there a fee involved?
5. How do most university students spend their leisure time in your country?
6. What kinds of activities do most families enjoy after work or school in your hometown?

IFI -Conversation Starters (cont.)

Pets

1. What is the most common kind of pet?
2. Where do people keep their pets?
3. What animals are useful for work, and how are they used?

Religious

1. What is the predominate religion in your country?
2. Is there a state religion? If so, what is it?
3. What is your perception of religion in this country?
4. What are your centers of worship like?
5. What is your concept or belief about God?

Children

1. How do parents select a name for their baby?
2. At what age do children start school?
3. Are children punished for bad behavior? Who does it?
4. What song or story do you remember from your childhood?
5. Is school mandatory? Up to what age? Does the government provide free education?

Shelter

1. Please describe the appearance of a typical home in your neighborhood.
2. What furniture is found in a typical residence?
3. How frequently do people move to a new residence?

Social Groups

1. What different languages do people speak?
2. How strong are class distinctions?
3. What types of organizations are most popular with adults?
4. What is the most common religion in your country?
5. Do you find that people are willing to openly discuss religious or political issues?

Family Life

1. What is the average family size in your country? How many members are in your family?
Do you have pictures?
2. Do grandparents or other relatives live in the same house with the family?
3. Do married women work outside the home? Do they have similar or different job opportunities as men?
4. What are some special holidays for your family, and how do you celebrate?
5. What is an acceptable way to meet someone to marry?
6. At what age do children leave home to live on their own?

Transportation

1. What forms of transportation are available in urban areas?
2. How do you get to school or work?
3. Is it customary for a family to go somewhere for vacation?