

Comfort and Harmony

Living in another culture can sometimes be a bit uncomfortable. Everything is so new that we can feel like a small child, not always knowing what to do.

There are two kinds of uncomfortable.

The kind none of us want is when we feel unsafe. Not that this would happen, but for example, say that you are told to go skydiving. Any time you feel unsafe, you have the right and obligation to say that you need to talk with your chaperone. Tell your chaperone or the Tokyo Labo Staff how you feel. They can help you determine if you are seeing the situation clearly and they will inform others if the situation is against the 4-H exchange program rules.

The good kind of uncomfortable are situations that are new to us: trying new foods, learning new skills, doing something in a different way than we do it at home, and doing something that we normally wouldn't choose to do, such as public speaking or an unfamiliar sport. This is more like the ache we get when we are developing our muscles; you have to stretch a little to grow. The best way to really understand a culture is to fully participate in that culture. The best way to grow as a person is to try new things. We encourage you to try everything. You may find that you enjoy it. If you try it and decide that it's not your favorite, then you have learned something about Japanese culture, as well as something about yourself. You have also shown that you care enough to try to do what your Japanese family and Labo Party are doing.

You may have heard that Japanese culture values harmony. Harmony helps people work together. It can protect others from discomfort and embarrassment. This is why Japanese people may be reluctant to say NO out loud in situations when an American would not hesitate. If someone says that a situation is "difficult" or "probably can't happen" or "we'll see" or

particular situation. While you are in Japan, you may see people apologizing for inconveniencing someone. You may hear them say they are sorry. This does not mean, as it may do in the USA, that they are accepting blame for a situation. It means that they are sorry that there is a problem and they want

You may be assigned your own chopsticks, slippers or rice bowl. This is probably not for you to take home, but a sign that, just like everyone else has assigned items, as a part of the family now you do, too. And as part of the family, you will need to keep your sleeping area clean and pick up after yourself. The Japanese “ecosystem” is different than Alaska; snack crumbs or a full trash can may attract cockroaches, and wet towels will mildew.