CISV Austin-San Antonio

Parent Handbook



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Brief History of CISV International

Dr. Doris Twitchell Allen, a psychologist at the University of Cincinnati, founded CISV, following the devastation of World War II and the hope generated by the creation of the United Nations. She saw CISV as a way to prevent the horrors of World War II in the future. By bringing together young people from different countries and cultures she hoped to "sow the seeds" for personal bonds and for an appreciation of cultural differences. She wanted to prevent the development of prejudices in young people. Her long-range goal was to have a more peaceful future.

In 1951 the first CISV Village was in Cincinnati. Interchange was established in 1962 and reunion villages became the Seminar Camp Program in 1971. CISV's premise is that individuals can best build peace when they have learned to live amicably, regardless of race, creed, culture or nationality. Thus cooperation, peace education, global thinking, respect for other points of view, non-violent conflict management and cross-cultural communication are important ingredients of CISV programs.

CISV educates and inspires action for a more just and peaceful world. We prepare children to become active and contributing leaders of a peaceful society. CISV endeavors to stimulate the life-long development of amicable relationships, effective communication skills, cooperative abilities, and appropriate leadership towards a fair and just world. Peace Education provides us with the Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge we need to become agents of change, both locally and globally. In other words, to become Active Global Citizens. Today CISV operates in 70+ countries. Since 1951, more than 250,000 people have participated in more than 6,500 international activities.

CISV Educational Principles:

- We appreciate the similarities between people and value their differences
- We support social justice, equality, and opportunity for all
- We encourage the resolution of conflict through peaceful means
- We create sustainable solutions to problems relating to our impact upon each other and the natural environment

Four Main Peace Education Content Areas:

- Diversity
- Human Rights
- Conflict and Resolution
- Sustainable Development

Learn by Doing:

- Do—Peace Education Activity
- Reflect—What you have learned from the activity?
- Generalize—How can this new learning be applied to a new context?
- Apply—Put your new perspective and knowledge into action

Read more about Peace Education: www.cisv.org/cisv-education/cisvpeace-education

Volunteering

Volunteers are the very heart of CISV. CISV Austin-San Antonio (ATXSA) has no – **zero** - employees. CISV USA only has two employees! Our chapter is a completely volunteer-run organization. That is why it is so important for every parent who sends a delegate to a CISV program to volunteer with our local chapter for **20 hours** per calendar year.

As a condition of sending children abroad to CISV's amazing global programs, CISV ATXSA must also HOST an international camp in Austin each year. And you guessed it – all our staff and leaders are volunteers (just as the staff, leaders, and chapter support who will care for your child during their CISV program are also volunteers). This year, our camp is a Step-Up 14 and happens June 27th through July 19th.

In June/July 2026, our Step-Up will host 40 teens from ten countries. This is a major production that takes scores of volunteers to do everything from hosting early arriving delegations at their homes, driving delegations from the airport to the campsite, providing snacks for excursions, to even providing medical and mental health care. Our volunteers are the lifeblood of CISV ATXSA.

- There are many ways you can help – every CISV family member has a gift or skill we can use. We need volunteers year-round to host chapter events, plan and/or chaperone mini-camps, keep our web and social media presence updated, and much more.
- We hope that you, like so many of our members, "catch the CISV bug" and volunteer long after your children have left home and become leaders out in the world.
- Your volunteer commitment starts now. You are asked to assist in some capacity with our hosted program and serve on a CISV board committee.
- CISV is a family-centered program. Although one child in your family may participate in travel, your entire family will benefit. The more involved your family becomes in CISV, the more you benefit.
- The only way this chapter exists and can offer programing to your child is through volunteers. Without your time and energy, the organization cannot continue.
- Note: When a volunteer becomes involved with children, CISV ATXSA must conduct a background check. This is required by CISV USA's insurance carrier when a volunteer becomes active. The background check must be done every two years, and once per year for volunteers driving program participants.

If you need help deciding how to spend your volunteer hours, please e-mail crystalcotti@gmail.com and we'll help you find a good fit.

Roles

Parent Roles

- Get to know your child's leader. It is important for her/him to get to know you and your child.
- Share as much personal information about your child with the leader as possible.
- Help your child build trust by establishing the leader's role as the authority figure, as they will act as a stand-in parent for you while your child is away.
- Attend all delegation meetings to increase your child's comfort level with their leader and peers.
- Take on a leadership role in the delegation (travel coordinator, forms coordinator, treasurer, etc.)
- Provide help as requested to prepare for cultural presentations and national nights.
- Keep your eye on the purpose and goals of CISV – "peace through understanding." Your role in preparing the delegation can have a huge impact on the experience for your child.

Points to Remember

- Your child's leader is a volunteer. Treat them with respect and consideration.
- Your child is preparing to embark on an incredible journey. Do not expect it to be perfect. It involves real people and real experiences. Compassion, flexibility, and acceptance go a long way.
- If travel issues arise, trust your leader, liaison, chapter Risk Managers, the CISV ATXSA board, and CISV's very wide international network to address them.
- CISV is not a travel camp or mission experience, but delegates will see a new part of the world and will represent the U.S. to their host community.
- There are many ways to achieve the same goal. Keep an open mind and communicate with your leader, group of fellow parents, and contacts at CISV ATXSA.

Leader Roles

Leaders deserve the full support of parents and delegates. In addition to passing rigorous interviews and background checks, they have completed child safeguarded training, attended two full days of national leader training in another city, and another full weekend of local training. Here are some responsibilities leaders take on for traveling delegations:

- Assumes the full responsibility of children during the entire experience.
- Getting children to and from the program site – through airports and customs.
- Acting on your behalf if a child is sick or injured; consoling them if homesick or feelings get hurt.
- Disciplining a child if they act outside of CISV behavioral expectations.
- Balance the roles of parent substitute, big sister/brother, friend, counselor and advisor.
- Adhere to and respect the rules and guidelines of this nation, the host country, and CISV International regarding:
    - Behavioral and cultural sensitivity
    - Inappropriate activities
    - Alcohol, drugs and smoking
    - Arrival and departure schedules
    - Use of telephone and other facilities

Traveling

National Travel Policy

- Delegations shall travel to and from the site of the approved CISV activity as a group from the same point of origin. Travel shall be direct to and from the CISV activity site. No side trips are permitted.
- All CISV participants in international programs will be covered by a single travel insurance policy through CISV International. Under the policy, participants will be covered for their program dates.

Delegation Travel

- Delegations and individuals traveling to CISV programs make their own travel arrangements; itineraries should meet the published arrival and departure times as determined by the host chapter.
- Itineraries should be selected based on the best routing (minimum number of layovers and ample—but not-excessive connection times between flights), with every effort to keep cost as low as possible. Efficient routes and safety should take precedence over cost.
- You are responsible for your child's airfare or other transportation costs plus an equal percentage of the leader's travel expenses.
- Pre-camp 1 will tell you the airport and times for arrival and departure. It is critical that travel is scheduled to arrive before the "arrive by" time and to depart after the "depart after" time.
- Family members cannot deliver delegates to camp or pick them up from camp.
- Delegates cannot meet their peers at a connecting airport.
- Plan a travel outfit to include the same color shirt for the entire delegation.
- Delegates may not wear CISV logos on clothes or bags while traveling.
- Ensure all tickets are linked, so if re-booking is necessary, they are re-booked together.
- When your flights are booked and you send your travel information to your liaison, please e-mail a copy to austin-riskmanager@cisvusa.org.

Passports, Visas, Specific Travel Requirements

- Make sure your child's passport is valid for six months past the return date.
- At least one parent must have a valid passport (valid six months beyond the return date) in case you need to get to your child (an option of last resort).
- If your destination requires a VISA, the chapter will let you know so you can obtain it ASAP.
- Review if any vaccines or health warnings are pertinent: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel.

Pre-camps

- Pre-camp 1 generally comes in March for summer programs and September for winter programs. This communication tells you the official dates and times for arrival and departure, as well as the location of the village or camp, contact names, and other countries who will be present.
- Pre-camp 2 will often describe the "theme" of the program and will introduce the staff and the facility. It will often contain details about "host country specific" communication deadlines.
- Pre-camp 3 is optional. It may talk about weather, what to bring, what not to bring, etc.

Communications

- Traveling delegations should establish a communications plan (phone, email/text, WhatsApp, etc.) so the leader can easily notify when they have arrived safely.
- Your child can have his or her phone while traveling to and from the campsite but once at camp, delegates do not have access to computers or smartphones.
- You will not be able to communicate with your child directly while they are at the program. Delegates may have access to technology at their homestay.
- Liaisons will communicate with leaders and solicit weekly updates and photos. Be aware that some locations are remote and leaders may have intermittent internet access.
- Program staff have access to technology. You will also have phone numbers for the program site as well as for the host chapter leadership.
- You may send letters and emails to your child though your liaison, but the host staff sets mail policy, and your child may or may not receive your communication. You may want to send a letter with the leader to be given to your child if they become homesick.
- Not every program does social media (FB, Instagram) – but many do. If so, please be prepared for the site to be updated intermittently. Often the energy to maintain social media dwindles before the end of camp. Be assured no news is good news and your child is having the time of their life.
- Should there be any serious illness or other event that affects your child's participation, you will be promptly notified by the liaison, leader, or camp staff.

Camp & Delegation Info

Where Children Stay and Security

- Villages, Step-Ups, Youth Meetings and camps are generally held at retreat centers, schools, or campsites. In most cases, CISV has exclusive use of the sites during the program.
- CISV International policy is that camp locations are not communicated to the public.
- They will be in a controlled environment. No matter where they are, the environment of camp will be much the same – it is all about the community of countries and the contained campsite.

Homestays

- For Village, Step-Up (and possibly Youth Meeting), there will be a "homestay" with a local family.
- During the homestay (usually 1-2 nights), delegates will experience life in their host country, probably see some local sites, eat local food, possibly do some shopping.
- For the first stay (upon arriving in the host country), delegates may all go to one family or the girls to one and the boys to another (it depends how many kids a family can house).
- For the Village mid-stay, our delegates are usually paired with delegates from another country.
- Most families will either be CISV families or closely connected to the host CISV chapter.
- In the US all home-stay families go through background checks. CISV International is committed to the safety of all children throughout their program experience and that includes homestays.
- At the beginning of the program, leaders may leave their delegates with the home-stay family and then go to the camp site to meet with the staff and plan the first few days of the program.

National Night and Open Day

Each Village delegation gets a special night to share their culture with staff, hosts, and the other delegations. This is known as "National Night." Preparation should include the following:

- Decorations must include a large US flag.
- A presentation or video including info about each delegate, family, home, pets, favorite activities. It should also include information/pictures about Austin/Texas/and the US.
- A game or dance that can be taught to everyone.
- A taste of home – food or drink that comes from the US (previous selections have included peanut butter & jelly sandwiches, macaroni and cheese, s'mores, apple pie, etc). Plan to send the food they choose.
- For Youth Meeting and Step Up, the program usually includes a "cultural activity" — less elaborate than National Night. The delegation will decide on the cultural activity and the items they will need.

Open Day

The host chapter invites local CISVers to visit and participate. Each country gets a table in an open-house type of atmosphere. For the delegation's display, you need to provide:

- Small items that represent Austin/Texas/the US that can be given away (candy, popular food items, Austin/Texas/ USA themed giveaways, etc.)
- USA flag and decorations and posters/tabletop displays of the USA and Texas.

Gifts

- You are expected to provide a small family gift for homestays (see above; Village has two homestays – one at beginning and one in middle; plan on providing six gifts in case the delegation is split up upon arrival and to allocate one for each child for the mid-stay).
- Step-Up has one homestay and Youth Meeting may or may not have a homestay.
- Your delegation is expected to bring a small gift to camp for staff members. There are usually about five staff and one or two junior staff. Staff members like CISV-branded items, like water bottles, drinking cups, notebooks, pillowcases, t-shirts. These items should be inexpensive. We have a wide selection of these items for sale from the CISV ATXSA online store.
- **Leader gifts**: Leaders are volunteers; they do not get paid to travel with and assume responsibility for your child. CISV ATXSA recommends each family donate $150 to their leader (or more, if feasible) when you pick up your child at the airport after camp. This helps them cover their bills during the time they are away.

Trading Items:

- Your child may want to take a few items for trading with other kids at camp, like an extra t-shirt or two and other CISV Austin-San Antonio branded items.
- Trading clothes is a favorite activity at CISV programs – t-shirts, sweatshirts, etc. CISV chapter gear (which you can purchase through the CISV ATXSA online store) are the most popular items.
- Trading items can also be small trinkets that represent our region or country (key chains, magnets, postcards, ball caps, etc.)

Money

- Spending money – Pre-camp communications usually state the dollar amount to bring to camp (generally around $250). Children spend this money on items at the camp store and on excursions.
- Travelers should have an emergency fund – separate from spending money. Your child should bring an equal amount of emergency money in case they need medical or dental care while at camp.
- There will be costs as the delegation meets/plans national night (purchases materials), makes delegation booklets, etc. It is helpful for one parent to act as treasurer and keep track of receipts so parents can "settle up" (at the airport upon departure if not before).

What to Take, What Not to Take

- Do not send anything that can't be lost or any clothing that has special meaning or significant value.
- Do not take homework – it won't get done.
- Send extras of critical items like contacts and glasses.
- Send comfortable, weather appropriate clothing, shoes for walking and running.
- Label your all your child's clothes for laundry days and send a mesh laundry bag.
- Medications and exact dosages must be given to the leader at the airport.
- Personal electronic devices are allowed for travel to and from the program site. They will be collected and put in a safe during the program.

Packing Night

Packing night occurs 1-2 nights before your delegation departs. This is the final meeting for delegates, their parents, leaders, and liaisons. This includes finalizing packing for the group and consolidating supplies. One family should host the group, and one family should contribute an extra suitcase. You should bring your child's packed suitcase and any "group" belongings like gifts, giveaways, an American flag, and ingredients for the delegation's national night dish. The extra suitcase is for group use only. Each delegate brings one checked suitcase and one carry-on item like a backpack. It's a best practice to include a change of clothes in the backpack and a small toiletry kit in case the checked bag is delayed. Packing night is also a good time to organize currency. Your liaison will facilitate important conversations at packing night, help weigh your child's suitcase, and gather all original paperwork to provide to your leader at the airport. The leader must travel with hard copies of the following forms for each delegate: Health form, Child Traveling With a Leader form, and a photocopy of child's passport photo page. Bring these to Packing Night.

Returning Home and Debriefing

- Have no expectations! Every child processes their experiences and encounters differently.Your child may talk non-stop upon return, or it could be several days or weeks before you begin to hear the stories. This does not reflect a positive or negative experience.
- Debriefing is required of all participants and parents. Your liaison will conduct the debrief and find a date and time that works for everyone.
- There is an evaluation component to the debrief that evaluates what went well and what could be better as the chapter keeps improving our programing, as well as the impact on you.

Forms

Overview and Instructions

MyCISV and the paperwork involved in preparing for camp can feel overwhelming, but it has an important purpose in ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone involved. Completing all forms fully, accurately and submitting them on time is important for keeping your delegation on track and enabling your host country and program staff to prepare for your child's arrival.

You need to complete four forms: **Child Code of Behavior, Child Traveling with Leader Legal Form, Delegation and Individual Information, and the Health Form.**

Upload signed forms on your child's MyCISV page by May 1 for summer programs. It may appear that you can electronically sign your child's paperwork in MyCISV, but we do not yet have this capability. You must physically sign the forms, scan them, save them, and then upload them to MyCISV. It is a labor-intensive process, and we look forward to the day we can offer electronic signatures in MyCISV!

Hold onto the original forms; you will provide them to your leader on packing night to deliver to the camp director (your delegation must arrive at camp with originals).

It is important to submit your paperwork on time because it allows your child's camp planners to not only account for your child but also plan for any dietary restrictions and physical and emotional health needs your child may have.

Health Form Notes

CISV ATXSA has a strict "No Secrets" policy when it comes to disclosing physical and emotional health needs your child may possess. We will not turn your child away because of special needs; we simply need to help your leader and camp staff plan how to best address your child's needs during their camp experience. **Please be thorough and forthright about your child's physical and emotional health.** This will help us help your child during their CISV experience and ensure we are equipped with the best possible resources to do so.

Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)

The U.S. Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service that sends you email updates and alerts from the U.S. embassy in the country where your child will travel. Several weeks before your child is due to travel, CISV ATXSA will send you instructions for joining the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). We highly recommend you enroll your child in this program. When you subscribe to STEP, you'll receive messages about emergency situations with instructions on what to do to make informed travel decisions. STEP messages include:

- Security alerts
- Demonstration alerts
- Health alerts
- Weather or natural disaster alerts
- Travel Advisory updates

Checklist

_____Apply for Passport (if necessary)

_____Complete and upload forms on MyCISV by May 1. Make Dr. appt for Health Form if necessary

_____Pay Program Fees (due by Spring General Meeting for summer programs)

_____Save the Date for Important Chapter Events Send-Off Party, Welcome Back Party, Holiday Party)

_____Set Delegation Meeting Times & Locations (at least 4, one sleepover required)

_____Meeting #1: _____

_____Meeting #2: _____

_____Meeting #3:_____

_____Meeting #4: _____

_____Sleepover: _____

_____Packing Night: _____

_____Divvy Up Delegation Parent Jobs

- Travel Coordinator: _____

- Purchase Host Family Gifts (quantity depends on program): _____

- Purchase Staff Gifts (five):_____

- Prepare Delegation Giveaway (booklet, placemat, CD, etc): _____

- Purchase Open Day Items: _____

- Purchase Nat'l Night (and/or Cultural Activity) Items: _____

- Treasurer: _____

_____Discuss communications strategy with leader and decide what works best for everyone (we recommend WhatsApp) — go ahead and start communicating that way.

Questions? Please e-mail us cisv.atxsa.board@gmail.com. We are happy to help.