



2025 Homestay Handbook

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
WHAT IS A HOMESTAY?	2
WHY BE A HOMESTAY HOST?	2
HOMESTAY SCREENING PROCESS	3
GUIDELINES	4
WE APPRECIATE YOUR FLEXIBILITY	6
CONTACT INFORMATION	7
ABOUT CIRCUS SMIRKUS	8
CIRCUS SMIRKUS CONTACT INFORMATION	9
IN CONCLUSION	9



INTRODUCTION

This Homestay Handbook will provide you with the basic information you need to determine if your household fulfills the requirements to be a homestay provider, and will serve as a reference should you become a homestay host.

WHAT IS A HOMESTAY?

Homestay: *noun*, -family, -host.

1. A family or person with whom Circus Smirkus troupers stay as guests during their time in a town.
2. A safe and welcoming home away from home for troupers during their time away from the show site.

While on tour, Circus Smirkus troupers (ages 10-18) stay with families in the communities where the Big Top Tour performs. A minimum of two troupers are assigned to each homestay family and they spend between three to six nights with their host families depending on the length of the tour's stay in town.

The role of a homestay host is to:

- Ensure that troupers are transported to and from the show site in a safe and timely manner.
- Provide nourishing meals and snacks as needed.
- Provide sleeping quarters for the troupers.
- Provide a quiet location for rest and sleep, as well as an atmosphere where troupers can comfortably relax and wind down after being "on" all day.

Self-Presented vs Presented Shows

There are two ways that Circus Smirkus visits a town to perform shows, and it's important to discuss the difference as it slightly affects some parts of the homestay process. A *self-presented show* is one that is managed completely by Circus Smirkus. The Smirkus Homestay Coordinator and later the Head Counselor will be your main point of contact for these towns. *Presented shows* are shows that are presented by other organizations, usually as a fundraising effort. Many of the responsibilities and tasks are handled by representatives of the organization, instead of Circus Smirkus. In these cases, there will be a Local Homestay Coordinator that works directly with the Smirkus Homestay Coordinator to facilitate the homestay process. You can tell if a show is self-presented vs. presented by visiting our [Big Top Tour](#) website. Shows that are presented by a third party organization will be noted with "presented by [name of organization]." It is also noted in the contact information at the end of this document.

WHY BE A HOMESTAY HOST?

The Circus Smirkus Big Top Tour is the only tented traveling youth circus in the United States. When you participate by being a homestay host, you get to play a unique and



important role in the success of the tour. You'll have the opportunity to provide troupers with a home away from home, get to know them personally, and potentially form lasting relationships.

The Smirkus Homestay Program does more than provide troupers with a comfortable place to sleep: the homestay experience adds a unique and personal experience for both the troupers and the participating host families.

Here's what just one homestay host thought of the experience...

"I just wanted to let you know a couple of wonderful things. First of all, the circus performance was the best as usual, and all of your troupers were talented, beautiful and so creative!

Also, our homestay troupers were just the best. We were honored to have [our troupers] stay with us, and they were so much fun to share the weekend with. Not only were they funny and welcoming of all of our requests for tricks and jokes and Circus Smirkus details, they were kind, respectful and so nice. They, and all of your troupers, are such great role models, for all of our youth, and especially my own two kids just loved learning and laughing with them all weekend. We have been missing them all day, and wishing we were at the show right now!

Thanks for allowing us to be a homestay family, and thanks for keeping the circus alive. We can't wait to do it again next year!! Best wishes for a successful and fun remainder of your tour!"

In Appreciation of Your Generosity...

Complimentary Show Tickets

We offer you two complimentary tickets to see Circus Smirkus *for each day the troupers are performing* during the stay. For example, if the troupers arrive Monday evening (no show), and perform Tuesday & Wednesday (show days), and leave Thursday morning, you would receive 4 tickets.

To claim your complimentary tickets for self-presented Smirkus shows, please email boxoffice@smirkus.org. To claim tickets for presented shows, please contact the local homestay coordinator directly (contact information at the end of this document). In either case, in your email please include: the host name from the homestay application for verification, the city, date, showtime (s), and number of tickets that you would like. Please also indicate if you have any ADA or mobility needs. All ticket requests must be made no later than 48 hours prior to the date of the first show. We are unable to provide complimentary tickets for sold out shows, so be sure to put your requests in early!

In addition to complimentary tickets, you also receive priority parking and reserved seating. Please note, these perks are only guaranteed if you arrive at least 45 minutes prior to the show, as availability cannot be guaranteed after that time frame.



HOMESTAY SCREENING PROCESS

To ensure the safety and well-being of our troupers, all potential homestay hosts must go through an application and screening process which includes:

- Completing an application.
- Providing the name of two personal references, which will be contacted by the Smirkus Homestay Coordinator.
- Criminal background checks for all members of the household who are 18 years of age or older. Be sure to provide legal names, full birth dates and an email address of each adult during the application process.
- A screening interview or phone call with the homestay coordinator may also be a part of your homestay application process so we and you can ask any outstanding questions.

Returning Host Families

Returning host families need to complete a new application and provide two references *every year*. Background checks will be done on returning host families *every other year*.

Applications are submitted online using the link below. For self-presented sites, after reviewing the applications, the Smirkus Homestay Coordinator will advise if you have been selected as a host family. For presented sites, the local homestay coordinator will advise you if you have been selected.

To apply to be a homestay host, visit the following link to complete the application: [2025 Circus Smirkus Trouper Homestay Host Application](#).

Circus Smirkus is ultimately responsible for the health and well-being of our troupers. As such, we reserve the right to press charges against any individuals who expose our troupers to tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs, or inappropriate conduct.

GUIDELINES

Reasonable Accommodations

- We require a minimum of two troupers at each homestay and strive for no more than four to six troupers at a homestay (depending on accommodations/beds). We cannot have solo trouper homestays, unless it is a parent taking their own child.
- Outbuildings: Detached buildings such as pool houses, guest houses, casitas, barns, etc are on a case-by-case basis. If troupers will be staying in an outbuilding at your



homestay, please disclose this and any pertinent details during the application process.

- Acceptable types of rooms include spare bedrooms, offices, finished basements, game rooms, extra living rooms, etc.
- Each trouper must be provided their own bed consisting of some sort of mattress, sheets, blankets, and pillows.
 - Acceptable types of beds: pull out sofas, inflatable mattresses, futons, etc. A couch of appropriate comfort and size may also be acceptable.
 - Not appropriate: Couch cushions on floor, thin camping pads, etc.
- Restrooms: 1 dedicated bathroom per 5 troupers, or 1 bathroom per 4 people in the house. Homestays must provide towels.
- Sleeping Arrangements: Upon arrival at the home, troupers and their homestays will decide upon the best rooming arrangements.
- Temperature Elements: Housing must be not too hot, not too cold. There must be access to fans, access to cooling or heating elements, and moderate temperatures.

Cigarette/Cigar Smoking

We will not house troupers in homes with hosts who smoke indoors. Additionally, smoking or vaping in vehicles while transporting troupers is prohibited.

Alcohol and Prescription Drugs

Any alcohol or prescription drugs in the home must be reasonably secured and is prohibited in trouper sleeping areas.

Illegal Drugs & Marijuana

Illegal drugs are strictly prohibited. If Circus Smirkus is made aware of illegal drug use in a homestay, troupers will be removed from the homestay immediately. While we recognize that recreational or medicinal marijuana use is legal in many states, Smirkus policy is that it be kept away from troupers (not seen or smelled).

Firearms

Homestay applicants must disclose during the application process whether they have firearms in their home, and must describe where and how they are secured. All firearms must be properly secured with both the firearm and ammunition locked up separately, and may not be secured in trouper sleeping areas. Smirkus reserves the right to decline a homestay applicant if they keep firearms in their home.

Rule of Three

Smirkus uses the "Rule of Three" to help guide youth and adult interactions and to ensure comfortable and safe interactions for participants and staff. This means that no trouper is



ever alone with an adult because either another adult or trouper is present. At homestays we encourage the rule of three but recognize it may not always be possible.

Meals and Snacks

When on-site during mealtimes, troupers are served two meals a day from our “pie car” (our traveling kitchen) at the show site. Before arriving on site in the morning, homestay hosts are expected to provide their troupers with breakfast, and due to the nature of their activities, most troupers will need a “second dinner” when they arrive at your home after performing all day (after all, most are growing teenagers). As a homestay host, you will be given information one week in advance about your visiting troupers’ food likes and dislikes, as well as any allergies, intolerances, or sensitivities. Please be sure to talk to your troupers about what they need at the end of the day to recharge their batteries!

Transportation

As a homestay host you must ensure troupers arrive on site for call times and are picked up at the designated time after the last performance. On show days, troupers normally need to be dropped off at the site three to four hours before the first performance. On days that troupers are scheduled for set-up, drop off times may be earlier. Pick-up time is 30 minutes after the last show of the day, with a later pick-up time after tear-down on the night of the last show. The first pickup of a site generally takes place at the front of the lot, with subsequent pickups happening inside the big top, but exact locations will be confirmed and provided in advance. Drop-offs are always at the front of the lot.

Homestay Drivers (this could be a friend or neighbor) must be at least 21 years of age and cleared with Smirkus staff if they are not listed on your family’s application. Carpools are acceptable with other homestays as long as the troupers and Head Counselor are made aware of arrangements.

The Head Counselor will provide homestays with the anticipated transportation schedule via email prior to their arrival. Any changes will be communicated when the tour arrives on site.

Trouper Assignments & Bios

Trouper assignments and bios as well as a pick up/drop off schedule will be sent to homestays by email one week before Smirkus arrives on site.

Buddy System

We require no fewer than two troupers per household. For everyone’s safety and comfort, a single trouper must not be left alone without another trouper present in the house or vehicle.

Evenings & Sleep

In general, troupers know they need to be well-rested to have energy to perform and will decide on their own bedtime accordingly. It is possible that younger troupers (and some older troupers) may need a friendly reminder about going to bed at a reasonable time and



it is okay for a homestay host to request a “quiet time” based on their family’s normal routine. Smirkus discourages troupers from staying up too late to avoid tired troupers the next day.

Time & Space to Be Alone

We ask that our troupers be given some privacy during their stay with you. They have been in the public eye all day and may need a little down time. This does not mean activities and events are not allowed, please just be understanding if a trouper would like some time and space to themselves.

Activities

We ask that our troupers be supervised during any recreational or sporting activities that may pose physical risk. A sprained ankle can jeopardize their summer experience. Troupers may use swimming pools or swim at beaches only when supervised by an adult.

Household Rules and Policies

Troupers appreciate the opportunity to be welcomed into your home. Please let your troupers know if you have household rules or expectations.

Laundry

Troupers really appreciate the opportunity to launder their clothes during their homestay.

What Troupers Think Makes A Good Homestay

“The thing that determines a good homestay from a bad one is the people. When the people are warm and really make me feel at home, it makes my stay so much better. I guess, just feeling safe and comfortable are the most important things to me. Doing things like seeing movies, going shopping, just talking, and going to the beach also stick out in my mind.”

“Although it is nice to get snacks and junk food once in a while, make sure the homestay provides staple stuff too, like juice, milk, salad or fruit.”

“The perfect homestay are people who get to know you and talk to you a lot but also give you down time just to chill with the other troupers in your homestay.”

“I love homestays where they say, ‘Here’s your room, here’s the bathroom and the towels, the food, the TV, the washer and dryer – help yourself!’ Most of the troupers are very independent and feel comfortable being on their own. It’s hard when you feel obligated to ask the host every time you want something, especially if you’re capable of doing it yourself.”

WE APPRECIATE YOUR FLEXIBILITY

Circus Smirkus will do its best to communicate any changes in a timely manner. In the event of a schedule change, the Head Counselor will inform the local homestay coordinator



who is then responsible for informing homestay families. In some cases, host families will be informed directly by the Head Counselor.

As you might expect, the Big Top Tour sometimes encounters events that necessitate a change in plan with very little notice. Pick-up and drop-off times are tentative and may need to be adjusted depending on daily events. Troupers should also be aware of their call schedule and can inform their homestay family of any last minute changes should they occur.

While we do our best to avoid last minute changes, homestay assignments may change at the last minute at the discretion of the Head Counselor. It is important for homestay hosts to be flexible and understanding when changes occur.

It is imperative that homestay families provide a reliable means of communication to the homestay coordinator prior to the troupers' arrival in town; please provide your homestay coordinator with your cell phone and email.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The Circus Smirkus Homestay Coordinator and/or your Local Homestay Coordinator will be your main contact(s) when discussing the option of being a Circus Smirkus homestay provider. These individuals will provide you with information and updates as your homestay application is processed.

Beginning about two weeks prior to the actual homestay dates, the Smirkus Homestay Coordinator will turn over all information to the Head Counselor, who oversees all trouper activities and travels with the tour. The Head Counselor will then serve as the primary Smirkus staff contact person for homestay hosts. They will:

- Provide trouper assignments for each homestay.
- Answer any questions during pick up and drop off times at the show site.
- Notify of any last minute changes.

The counseling staff assists the Head Counselor and may also have interactions with homestay hosts, especially when picking up and dropping off the troupers at show sites. It is very important at the initial pick-up that you meet all of the other counselors.

One week prior to picking up their assigned troupers, homestay hosts will be provided with a list of information and instructions for contacting the Smirkus tour staff in case of an emergency. Homestay hosts will be provided with 24-hour contact information for the Head Counselor (troupers will have this information as well).



Smirkus Homestay Coordinator

For all Smirkus Self-Presented sites (Waterbury VT, Middlebury VT, Manchester VT, Waltham MA, Marshfield MA, Hanover NH, Milton VT, and more TBD)

Jasmine Rose

homestays@smirkus.org

jasmine.rose@smirkus.org

Smirkus Head Counselor

TBD

tour.head.counselor@smirkus.org

Homestay Coordinator Contact Information

Harwich, MA

Presented by the Harwich Children's Fund

Diane Turco, tturco@comcast.net

Sheila House, hitthedunes@gmail.com

Greenfield, MA

Presented by North Star

Main contact for homestays: Sue Sumner, suesurner@gmail.com

Please CC on all correspondence: Jodi Cutler, jodi@northstarteens.org

Newbury, MA

Presented by Theater in the Open

Maddison Shea, maddie@theaterintheopen.org

Kennebunkport, ME

Presented by Kennebunkport Consolidated Schools

Angie Welch, awzorek@gmail.com

Cumberland, ME

Presented by Portland Ovations

Ciara Neidlinger, cneidlinger@portlandovations.org

Don't hesitate to get in touch with your site's homestay coordinator with any questions about your role as a homestay family for Circus Smirkus.

ABOUT CIRCUS SMIRKUS

Mission Statement

The mission of Circus Smirkus is to promote the skills, culture, and traditions of the traveling circus and to inspire youth to engage in life enhancing adventures in the circus



arts. Since 1987, Circus Smirkus has been bringing the transforming power of the circus arts to people of all ages through three principal programs: the Circus Smirkus Big Top Tour, Circus Smirkus Camp, and Circus Smirkus School Residencies.

History

Circus Smirkus was founded by Rob Mermin, who in his youth ran off to Europe to apprentice himself in circus life. Rob spent more than a decade performing as a clown and mime and went on to teach mime, movement, and circus skills for many years in schools and colleges in the US and abroad. He founded Circus Smirkus in Vermont to give kids the chance to run away to their own circus and experience a “living adventure” of their own.

Smirkus performers, known as troupers, range in age from 10 to 18. The blending of ages and generations makes the company a real circus family, with older troupers acting as mentors to the younger kids. Troupers are selected through an audition process that begins in October. Many of them begin training in our circus camp or in similar circus programs, and then audition for the tour after they've developed solid skills.

The Smirkus troupe includes performers and coaches from around the world. Our guest foreign performers come from international circus schools through contacts within the circus communities in Canada, Africa, Europe, Russia, New Zealand and England. Since our founding, we have had troupers and coaches come to us from Canada, China, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Netherlands, Russia, Sweden, Thailand, Ukraine, Zambia, not to mention ten Native American nations and most of the U.S. states.

Many Smirkus alumni have gone on to work for circuses such as Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey, Cirque du Soleil, the Big Apple Circus, Chicago's Midnight Circus, and Circus Smirkus itself, as well as many circuses in Europe and around the world.

For more information about Smirkus' history, programs, and related circus links, please visit: www.smirkus.org.

CIRCUS SMIRKUS CONTACT INFORMATION

Physical & Mailing Address:

Circus Smirkus
1 Circus Road
Greensboro, VT 05841

Telephone: 802-533-7443

E-mail: homestays@smirkus.org

URL: www.smirkus.org



IN CONCLUSION

Homestays are one of the most memorable parts of the tour for Circus Smirkus troupers and it's a program that is critical to the success of the tour. **We would like to offer a heartfelt thank you for opening your homes to Circus Smirkus and for helping to make the summer a fantastic experience for our troupers!**

Your feedback and comments are helpful, please provide your local homestay coordinator with any feedback on your homestay experience.