



2023 Homestay Handbook

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Circus Smirkus Contact Information

Physical & Mailing Address:

Circus Smirkus
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E-mail: tour@smirkus.org
URL: www.smirkus.org

INTRODUCTION

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

CIRCUS SMIRKUS STAFF & LOCAL COORDINATORS

Your **Local Homestay Coordinator** and/or the **Circus Smirkus 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.

During the actual homestay dates, the **Head Trouper Counselor** oversees all trouper activities and serves as the primary Smirkus staff contact person for homestay hosts along with two additional counseling staff. The counseling staff assists the Head Trouper Counselor and may also have interactions with homestay hosts, especially when picking up and dropping off the troupers at show sites. They are responsible for providing the trouper assignments for each homestay. It is very important at the initial pick-up that you meet the counselors.

The Head Trouper Counselor will be available to answer any questions during pick up and drop off times at the show site.

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 Trouper Counselor (troupers will have this information as well).

Smirkus Homestay Coordinator: Emilie Arbaugh, homestays@smirkus.org

Head Trouper Counselor: TBA, tour.head.counselor@smirkus.org

Homestay Coordinator Contact Information

- [Greensboro, VT / Waterbury, VT / Milton, VT / Rutland, VT / Hanover, NH / Wilton, NH / Waltham, MA / Fryeburg, ME](#)
Circus Smirkus: Emilie Arbaugh – homestays@smirkus.org
- [Simsbury, CT / Simsbury Meadows Performing Arts Center](#): Missy DiNunno, missy@simsburymeadowsmusic.com
- [Marshfield, MA / Marshfield Education Foundation](#): Beth Winn, beth.winn@gmail.com
- [Northampton, MA / North Star](#): Sue Sumner, suesurner@gmail.com
- [Newbury, MA / Theater in the Open](#): Sierra Gitlin, sierragitlin@gmail.com
- [Kennebunkport, ME / Kennebunkport Consolidated School](#): Lindsey Nunan, lindseynunan@yahoo.com
- [Portland, ME / Portland Ovations](#): Katelyn Manfre, kmanfre@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.

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

WHAT IS A HOMESTAY?

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

1. A family or person with whom Smirkus troupers stay as guests during their time in a town.
2. A safe and welcoming 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 job 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. While troupers often share rooms at homestays, we require that each trouper has their own bed.
- 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.

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.

What Homestays Think 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!"

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.”

GUIDELINES

COVID-19 Policy

At Circus Smirkus we strive to create a safe and healthy environment for our participants, staff, volunteers, and audience members.

Circus Smirkus requires proof of up-to-date vaccination (including boosters as recommended by CDC) against Covid-19 with a CDC or WHO authorized vaccine for all staff, troupers, and homestay hosts. Additional Covid-19 protocols may be updated based on current public health guidelines, and are subject to change following state and/or local ordinance, guidance from the CDC, and at the discretion of Circus Smirkus for the health and safety of our participants and staff.

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 about your visiting troupers’ food likes and dislikes, as well as any allergies. 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 shortly 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 shortly after the last show of the day, with a later pick-up time after tear-down on the night of the last show. Drivers 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 Trouper Counselor are made aware of arrangements. Troupers should be picked up at the entrance to the big top.

The Head Trouper 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 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.

Smoking

We will not house troupers in homes with hosts who smoke indoors.

Laundry

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

FLEXIBILITY

Circus Smirkus will do its best to communicate any changes in a timely manner. In the event of a schedule change, the Head Trouper 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 Trouper 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. In addition, homestay assignments may change at the last minute at the discretion of the Head Trouper 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.

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. Families or individuals interested in providing a homestay are required to complete an application and provide the names of two personal references, which will be called by Circus Smirkus staff, even if you are a returning homestay family. Please note that returning host families will be asked to complete a new application form every year.

All members of the household who are 18 years or older will be run through a criminal background check, making it vital for families to provide legal names, full birth dates and an email address of each adult. This information is requested in the application, but we wanted you to be aware ahead of time. Background checks will be done on returning host families *every other year*.

Applications are submitted online using the link below. After reviewing the applications, the Smirkus Homestay Coordinator will advise the local homestay coordinator of the status of the applicants. Local homestay coordinators will then advise families in their area if they have been selected as a host family.

Link to application: <https://forms.gle/eubWBYCQA7fpXKpp7>

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, or illegal drugs.

IN CONCLUSION

Homestays are one of the most memorable parts of the tour for Circus Smirkus troupers. Many troupers and their homestay families form lasting relationships and are matched year after year. Your feedback and comments are helpful, please provide your local homestay coordinator with any feedback on your homestay experience.

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!