

Stages of Relationship with Your International Friend

Stage One

Your relationship with your international friend, particularly if she is not a follower of Jesus, will probably begin at what we might call (surprise!) Stage One:

- You extend genuine friendship to your international friend and find ways to serve her practical needs.
- You invite your international friend to your family events and join her at her national holiday celebrations. You show interest in her country, studies, work, family, beliefs, problems, and needs.

Stage Two

As trust builds between you and your international friend, your relationship shifts to Stage Two:

- She trusts you to treat her with respect and with sensitivity to her feelings, beliefs, and needs. She can open up and be herself, express herself honestly, and talk about personal issues with you.

Stage Three

But because Christ is central to your life, you hope and pray that your relationship moves to Stage Three:

- Your international friend is willing to learn from you about Christian beliefs and experience.

As you spend time with your international friend, ask God to provide natural leads into a discussion of your friend's spiritual interests or needs. People from most non-Christian cultures are curious and interested in the topic of religion. Many Americans view the topic of religion as taboo in light social conversation and feel uncomfortable when it is seriously introduced; however, internationals often welcome such discussion. Indeed, you may be pleasantly surprised to find how quickly your friend wants to move on to Stages Two and Three. But if she shows a reluctance to talk about spiritual matters, be patient. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the sensitivity to assess accurately your relationship with your friend and her "felt needs." May God grant you the right words to say and the right times to say them with respect and love, to help someone far from home and maybe far from God.