

# AFS AUSTRALIA SAFETY TIPS



*Dream. Discover. Explore. Go AFS!*

Dear Student,

## **Welcome to AFS Australia!**

You are about to start your own unique AFS experience. We hope that you come to love our country as much as we do. We look forward to sharing our culture and language with you – and learning about yours!

AFS Australia is here to support you. This safety booklet has been prepared to guide you during your time in Australia. It will give you some useful tips about going to school, making friends and adjusting to a new culture. An explanation about the rules and policies of AFS Australia is included in our “Welcome to Australia” booklet. We suggest that you use this booklet as a resource for your stay.

Australia is a relatively safe country. However we have particular ways of ensuring personal safety. This booklet will help you understand the way that Australians approach daily situations e.g.: how to lock the house, what to expect if you go out without your Host Family, and about relationships in Australia. You may discover that you have questions that are not answered in this book – please contact your Support Person to discuss them.

Australians are very open people and willing to answer questions about personal issues. We encourage you to communicate openly with your Host Family – you should be able to approach them and talk about personal matters. Your Support Person is always available to talk to you, and so are AFS volunteers and AFS staff members. Open communication and following the rules and advice of AFS staff, volunteers and your Host Family will be your best safeguards.

Enjoy your time in Australia and make the most of the opportunities that are available to you for a rewarding AFS experience!

## Personal Safety Issues

### In and around the home

Here is an outline of the general way of life of Australian families. However, remember that Australia is a very large and diverse country – this means that rules and safety concerns will be different depending on your region and family. Read this outline and then discuss safety with your Host Family as they will know their area best.

In Australia people usually lock their doors and windows when they leave their home. In smaller towns where security is not such an issue, families may not lock their homes at all. Families in the city will probably lock their front & back door even while they are inside. You may be trusted with a key to the home and be expected to lock up the house according to instructions given by your Host Family.

Some question that you should ask your Host Family:

- Do you lock the doors and the windows? When should they be locked?
- Will I have my own house key?
- What should I do if I am home alone and a stranger knocks on the door?
- In case of an emergency who do I contact? Where are the emergency contact numbers?
- Do you have first aid equipment and a fire extinguisher? Where are they?
- How should I answer the phone? What information can I tell strangers?
- Are there any appliances that I should not use or that often cause problems?

### Outside the home

Your Host Family will know their community and will orientate you to the community and surrounding area. They will give you advice on places to go, places to avoid and how to get around. You should take their advice seriously and ask them any questions that might help you feel more secure in the community.

Australia is a reasonably safe country so you will probably be allowed out to visit friends, go to the shops or attend sporting activities on your own. You should always tell your Host Family where you are going and leave information about how you can be contacted.

Your family will probably expect to know:

- Where you are going. The address and a phone number
- What time you expect to be back
- If you are going to be late
- Who you are going with

Public telephones are common in Australia and you can make a local phone call for 50 cents or with a phone card. Some public phones no longer accept coins, so we recommend that you purchase a phone card from a newsagent and carry it with you at all times. Always carry with you your home phone number and the AFS Emergency phone number.

Public transport in Australia is reasonably safe to use. However, at night, you will need to be more cautious and should sit close to the blue safety light on a train or close to the driver on a bus. It is advisable to have someone meet you when you get off the train/ bus at night.

Pick-pockets, robberies, bag snatches and muggings are not a serious problem in Australia; however, we advise you to be cautious with your personal belongings on the street and while at school. Always keep your wallet in a safe place and do not carry large amounts of money around with you. It is also advised not to be out at night alone and to always stay in well lit areas.

Some questions you should ask you Host Family:

- Are there unsafe areas in this community where I should not go?
- Are there certain places where I should not go at night?
- What are the rules for when I go out at night? What time should I be home?
- Does the public transport operate at night and is it safe?
- What should I do if I am approached by a stranger?

## **At School**

Schools in Australia are generally very safe. You may be allocated a locker where you can keep you school books, bag and personal belongings; however it is still recommended that you do not leave valuables or large amounts of money in your locker.

There will always be someone at school that you will be able to talk to about any problems. This could be your Year Coordinator, School Counsellor or a teacher that you feel comfortable with.

## **AFS Rules and Policies**

AFS has established policies to ensure your welfare. While you are in Australia AFS has the responsibility for your safety and wellbeing. This includes the legal responsibility for students.

### **Illegal Behaviour**

AFS students hosted in Australia are subject to Australian law and are responsible for following the law. AFS is not able to protect a student from legal proceedings. Should your actions lead to legal action, AFS will provide guidance.

### **Driving**

AFS students will not drive a car or other motorised vehicles on public roads. They will not fly an aircraft. Breaking this rule is cause for early return to the home country.

### **Drugs**

All students are forbidden to use drugs not prescribed for medical purposes, and other illegal substances. In Australia, use or possession of drugs is punishable by law. Breaking this rule is cause for early return to the home country.

### **Hitchhiking**

AFS students in Australia are forbidden to hitchhike. This is dangerous and AFS cannot take responsibility for students who choose to hitchhike. Breaking this rule is cause for early return to the home country.

### **Drinking**

All students under the age of 18 are prohibited by law from purchasing alcohol or drinking alcohol in a public place. Breaking this law is cause for early return to the home country.

AFS discourages the consumption of alcohol by all students, whether in public or private. Excessive consumption of alcohol is also cause for early return to the home country.

### **Smoking**

All students under the age of 18 are prohibited by law from purchasing or smoking cigarettes. Breaking this law is cause for early return to the home country.

## Uncomfortable Social Situations

### **Laws, Illegal Drugs and Alcohol Abuse**

In Australia the legal age for purchasing and drinking alcohol is 18 years. Underage drinking, or buying alcohol for a minor, is punishable by law. Hotels, bars and clubs are very strict in Australia and ask for current photo ID before they allow you into the establishment.

Alcohol will not be served at AFS functions to students. Your Host Family might offer you an alcoholic beverage, which is acceptable under their supervision. It is quite common for host parents to enjoy a glass of wine or beer with their evening meal. If they do offer you a drink you are not obliged to drink alcoholic beverages - even if someone insists you do and pretends to be upset if you don't. If this happens, we recommend that you talk to your support person. AFS expects you to have a responsible attitude towards alcohol. Abuse of alcoholic beverages is cause for early return.

If you are invited to a party or a special event and are not sure if it will be safe, find out a little about the party or event e.g.: where is it being held and who will be there. Your host siblings, parents, friends or teachers at school should be able to give you information about the event and the people who will attend. Your host parents may forbid you to attend certain kinds of parties or events. You should respect your host parents' advice, even if others you know are going.

If you find yourself in a place where you're not comfortable - because drugs/alcohol is being used or because you are not at ease with the people - you should never be ashamed to leave. If you don't want to hurt people's feelings, you might say you have to go because you're tired or not feeling well.

When going out, you should always think about the way you are coming back. You should check the public transportation timetable - many trains and buses do not run at night. If you intend to come back by car with a friend, make sure he/she has not been drinking alcohol. We strongly advise you not to accept a ride from someone you don't know well. We also remind you that hitch-hiking is strictly forbidden for AFS students.

## **Sexual Harassment**

Cultures differ in their views of appropriate sexual behaviour and practice for young people. Australians are fairly open to talk about the subject of sexual education. You may wish to discuss and clarify acceptable behaviour - the advice of people you have come to know and trust is very valuable.

In societies where some young people are sexually active, there are also many who are not. You should not compromise your own personal values and beliefs regarding sexual behaviour. If you have sexual intercourse, you must protect yourself against pregnancy, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. You can buy condoms in any pharmacy or supermarket in Australia. Under Australian law, it is illegal to have sexual intercourse with a person under 16 years of age.

Sexual harassment occurs in most countries and Australia is no different. In some situations it may be unclear to you if you are being sexually harassed or if a particular person's behaviour is inappropriate. **Trust your own instinct: if you feel uncomfortable, leave the situation.** Your host siblings/parents and friends will be able to advise you about normal behaviour of people you do not know. You can also ask teachers, the AFS volunteers in your community, or AFS staff.

It is important to remember that you are in a different country and your clothes, gestures and attitudes might seem inappropriate in Australia. Exchange students should be careful about the message they are sending by dressing provocatively or by using provocative body language. Australians usually shake hands when they meet one another. Friends may hug or kiss once on the cheek. You will learn best by observation – watch your friends and host siblings and try to follow their example.

## **Acceptable language and behaviour**

Swearing and using abusive language and behaviour, is considered to be offensive in Australia. Sniffing and spitting is not acceptable behaviour.

In formal situations, such as at school, visible tattoos and body piercings are not acceptable.

## Natural Disasters

### Bushfires

Australian summers can be incredibly hot. Combined with the serious drought that we currently face, bushfires can be a big problem. If you live in an area where bushfires occur, you will generally have a lot of warning of fire approaching, and your Host Family will guide you to pack your essential belongings and leave the home to go to a safe place. The Fire Services in Australia evacuate people from their homes, if needed, with as much warning as possible and provide information and advice about bushfires to the community.

A Fire Ban may be in place in your area of Australia. This means that you must use gas or electricity for cooking (no wood-fuelled barbecues), and smokers must be very careful when disposing of cigarette butts.

## Dangerous Animals

### Snakes and Spiders

Some Snakes and Spiders in Australia are extremely venomous and can be deadly. These snakes and spiders are generally found in areas where there is a lot of bushland or in rural areas. If you see a venomous or unfamiliar snake or spider, **do not attempt to handle it**. Tell your Host Parents or another adult immediately. Hospitals in Australia carry anti-venom for venomous snakes and spiders. Your Host Family will be able to advise you on whether there are any venomous snakes and spiders found in your community. There are websites for each State in Australia that provides pictures of snakes and spiders for identification and first aid advice.

## Emergencies

Always keep your Host Family phone number on you. In case of emergency, you should try and contact your Host Family, an AFS local contact person or AFS Head Office.

### **AFS Head Office**

Monday to Friday 9am-5pm

(02) 9215 0077 or

1800 023 982 (free call).

In the case of an emergency, a member of staff can be contacted on the AFS 24hr Emergency Phone.

### **AFS 24hr Emergency Phone**

0414 594 694

### **National Emergency Numbers**

Fire, Ambulance and Police - 000

## Conclusion

The best advice that AFS Australia can give on personal safety is to:

- ➔ Get to know Australian culture, attitudes and behaviours well through questions, observations & conversations with your Host Family, peers and AFS support contacts.
- ➔ Take seriously any concerns that your Host Family and school have expressed, follow their advice and accept their rules.
- ➔ Do not ignore your own instinct. If you feel uncomfortable or vulnerable take action to overcome this situation.
- ➔ Do not compromise your own personal behavioural values & beliefs.
- ➔ Use your common sense, keep an open mind and enjoy your stay in Australia!