



SAFETY TIPS

During your experience, you will surely find new and different situations along the way and you may not be aware of what is proper and acceptable especially regarding your own safety in our country.

The purpose of this “Safety Tips” is to make recommendations and give you guidelines for your physical welfare and security.

Due to the continental size of the country and consequent diversity of towns and population, the concept of security varies a lot from place to place in Brazil. For instance, you can be placed in a metropolis or in medium size cities where families live in buildings with security personnel or in more rural areas where people even may not be used to lock doors.

As you see, it would be impossible to tell you how to behave in every particular situation you may face. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to discuss the local security aspects and your questions concerning personal safety with your host family and AFS volunteers upon arrival. In addition, you should follow the recommendations included in this guide in order to assure your safe stay in Brazil.

TWO BASIC RULES

1) One way for you to be prepared for any problems, is to carry a photocopy of your passport in your purse or wallet and your Brazilian Id Card at all times. Please see detailed information on how to get this ID in the guide *Bem Vindo ao Brasil*. (intensive program students will not receive the ID). Another important paper to carry is the *AFS Medical Card* which you will receive after your arrival in Brazil. You should also carry your host family’s home and work telephone numbers, and the numbers for your local AFS volunteers and the National Office. In addition, memorize your host family’s home and work telephone numbers.

2) Before agreeing to go out with your friends, you should get permission from your host parents. Always make it a rule to tell them your plans: where you are going, who with, what you are going to do and when you are returning. Your host family knows the most about their community and is best prepared to give you advice about places it would be better for you to avoid and how best to get around. You should take their advice seriously and follow their recommendations.

A third one: Ask!

In general, your host family is not likely to know what you are worried about, and needs to be informed about this by you. For example, host families will usually explain about making telephone calls, but may not realize that you may have concerns about how to answer the telephone, especially if you are not comfortable in using the host country language and are not yet familiar with people who may be calling. AFS encourages you to ask your host parents about all issues related to your safety.

Although the way your host family wishes you to act may vary from family to family, it is important that you know the general tips from AFS in Brazil regarding the following specific issues or situations.

IN OR AROUND THE HOME

Alone at home...

When you are alone at home, always make sure the door is locked and chained (if available).

Never open the door to strangers, unless your family informs you that someone (relative or friend) is coming.

If someone is at the door, always be sure to check who is there by looking through the peephole (*olho mágico*) or talking on the intercom before opening the door. If you are unable to understand what that person is saying or you are not sure who it is, ask them to come back later (*por favor, volte mais tarde*).

Ask your host family what to do when a stranger comes to your home when you are alone: for example, whether or not you should answer the phone or intercom (*porteiro eletrônico*) or receive deliveries. If yes, ask them how.

It is important to know who you should contact in case there is a problem and you are alone at home.

Never say you are alone at home if you do not know who you are talking to. Sometimes, if a stranger calls it may be necessary for you to say you are not alone. Of course, if a close neighbor or someone you know well comes to your home when you are by yourself, after checking who they are, you may decide to open the door, if you think it is safe.

House keys...

If your host family gives you the house key (*chave de casa*), you should be careful not to lose it. Ask your host family whether you need to lock the doors and windows when you go out or at night, and when and how to lock them; be sure to follow their instructions correctly.

Ask your host family what you should do in case you lose the house key and you find the house locked.

Ask them where you should go and who to phone to.

Personal Information...

Ask your family to whom you can safely give personal information. Ask them if you are allowed to give the home phone number to your friends and if they have rules about this issue.

Never give your telephone number or address to strangers who speak to you on the streets or on the phone (suspicious calls should be kept as short as possible). Even if a person seems friendly and trustworthy, you have no idea what kind of intention this person has.

This is also a rule for internet use. Be extremely careful with the information about yourself and your host family (specially home phone numbers, cell phone numbers and home address) you disclose on the web.

Weapons...

It is possible that your host parents keep a gun at home for personal safety reasons. Do not touch it and never play with it even if you are sure it is not loaded. Many serious accidents happen due to this reason.

Although weapons are relatively easily available for private citizens, its possession is only legal for people aged 21 years old or older. It is important to know that the unauthorized possession of weapons is considered a legal crime in Brazil.

OUTSIDE HOME**Arriving at home unexpectedly...**

In case you are out of the house and decide to come back at a different time than what your host parents were told, make sure you call them first so that they can expect your arrival and don't get worried. In some communities where people are more concerned about safety, arriving late at home unexpectedly may lead your hosts to take you by a stranger trying to get into their house or apartment.

Dangerous Areas...

Ask your host family how safe is your neighborhood, if it is safe to carry your valuables with you (jewelry, money, etc) and if you can be outside the house late at night..

At the earliest opportunity, have your host family and local AFS volunteers teach you where the dangerous areas in your city or region are located and how local people avoid or deal with dangerous situations. It is important for you to know thoroughly the layout and names of places in your area, as well as the times you should particularly avoid such areas.

In many Brazilian state capitals and smaller cities, there are some very poor neighborhoods - generally slums - which were forgotten by the government for many years and nowadays are ruled by drug dealers.

Although the majority of its residents are workers and friendly citizens, you should not enter these areas and must be alert if you are in the surroundings! In some of these dangerous districts - especially in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo - there is a real risk of gunfire and stray bullets.

If You Get Lost...

..and have to ask for directions, ask a person in uniform such as a policeman.

Buy a telephone card ("cartão telefônico") and always have some cash with you. This is in case of an emergency situation or to call your family if you are lost. You should also keep with you the phone number of your AFS local contact that can help you in such situations.

If You Are Not Used To Crowded Urban Centers...

...there are important advices that you should consider! Try to carry your back-pack in the front.

Pay attention at your wallet, purse and other valuable things while walking in crowded streets, buses or subways.

Avoid empty streets since many crimes happen in quiet places. Never carry a lot of money with you.

You should have only what you need for the day. Make sure that you put your money, purse or valuables in your bag, so they are not showing. Be careful about people who may approach you from behind or suddenly talk to you on the street. Also, do not pay attention to any sales talk while walking on the streets.

Beware of street children. While many of them are nice and inoffensive, others are used to steal and have developed smart ways to do it. Don't underestimate them. They usually act as a group and have the protection of older people.

Public Transportation...

In most Brazilian cities, the main public transportation consists of medium size buses and in general terms they are considered safe to be used during daylight hours. The exceptions are mainly in big cities (like Rio and São Paulo) where there may occur armed robbery in some bus lines at any time of the day. The subway is clean and convenient but is not totally free of robbery. In any public transportation system, you should be careful especially at rush hours, because it is easy for pickpockets to steal.

Regular taxi services are usually not reliable for tourists and foreigners in bus stations and airports of many big cities. Whenever you are in these places, take special cabs which require prepaid fares. They are more expensive but also much safer.

INTERNET USAGE & CONCERNS

The information you post online or send electronically can easily become public. When you provide personal contact data "virtually", you are assuming the risk of being found by someone dangerous in the "real world." The same happens when you post or send intimate information and images that may attract bad intentioned people, expose you to cyber bullies and others.

Keep in mind that some material that you naively publish at the web can also damage your reputation and jeopardize your academic and professional future.

Be careful about the frequency and the purpose why you access the web. Addiction to Internet has been identified as a major factor to school failure. Besides, it makes you spend much time in the "cyberspace", missing opportunities for a healthy engagement in a host community where many interesting things are waiting to be discovered. There, in the "real world" is where your host family, friends and schoolmates are living. The exchange program is meant to be a time for creating ties and developing personal relationships, don't let the Internet take this unique experience from you

AT SCHOOL

Ask your host family or AFS local volunteers for advice about what kind of guidance you can get in your host school if needed. Most educational institutions have a Principal (*Diretor*), a Vice Principal and a guidance counselor (*orientador*).

The use of illegal drugs and violence are not common in the majority of Brazilian high schools. However, if you feel threatened by someone or if somebody offers you drugs at school say NO. If this person insists, ask your host parents or counselor for advice.

If you know students who are breaking the school rules regarding drugs, smoking, drinking alcohol or not attending classes, please keep away from them. **Keep in mind that being expelled from school will be a reason for an early return to your home country.**

ILLEGAL DRUGS

It is forbidden for all AFS participants to consume drugs except those prescribed for medical purposes. Explicit violation of this rule is cause for dismissal from the program and immediate return to the home country. You should remember this whenever you find yourself in a situation where illegal substances are being used or there is an excessive use of alcohol.

The early return of the participant also applies to situations when s/he is *involved* with drugs. It is important to understand that *involvement* not only means actually using drugs, but also having drug paraphernalia in personal possession, frequenting places where drugs are used or knowingly associating with persons using these substances, etc.

For the reasons above, AFS recommends that you find out a little about the event (rock concert, parties in general and specially Carnival parties and the so called “Rave” party, etc) you are interested in going to. Usually your host sibling, parents, friends or teachers at school can give information about the event and the people expected to attend. It is also important that you respect your host parents’ advice regarding your participation in the event, even if others you know are going.

DRIVING

In Brazil driver licenses are only given to 18 years old people or older. Although many participants may be allowed to drive at their home country, **driving is not permitted in this program and breaking this rule causes the early return of the participant.**

Cars are driven on the right hand side. Be careful when you cross the streets, especially in big cities where many drivers do not respect transit signals. Pay attention if the streets don’t have pedestrian crossing.

Brazil has one of the highest rates of car accidents in the world. Many of these accidents are caused by drunk drivers. Do not take a ride with someone who has drunk alcohol beverage and is incapable to drive responsibly. In such cases you should call your host parents to pick you up.

DRINKING ALCOHOL

In Brazil, the legal age for buying alcoholic beverages and drinking in public is 18. Although this law is not much enforced, the police is legally authorized to take drunk teenagers to a judge.

There are no cultural or religious bans on drinking alcohol as a general rule. However, young people are expected to know their limits for drinking and going out just for the sake of getting drunk isn’t popular.

The loss of control by alcohol use creates vulnerability. Poor judgment may result in your taking part in activities which might be considered criminal acts subject to disciplinary punishments. You could become a victim of a crime or of violence by associating with other individuals who will take advantage of you. You might decide to take part in high risk activities which you would otherwise not have done except for the over-confidence from drinking alcohol. You could be seriously injured in an accident. You could pass out, become ill and not have access to assistance. You could become the victim of sexual misconduct by others, becoming the victim of rape or other violence. You could also become aggressive and act as a perpetrator assaulting and harming others.

Always remember that according to our culture, being drunk is no sign of maturity and certainly not accepted by the families.

For all the reasons above, we trust you to treat the availability of alcohol in our country very responsibly. Check out how your family handles it and go along.

NO HITCHHIKING

Never ask or accept rides from strangers. Never hitchhike (*pegar carona*). This is a must for boys and girls. You must be conscious of the fact that a car can be a locked room on wheels. For being unsafe, hitchhiking is not allowed by AFS and the violation of this rule may result in the early return of the participant.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Cultures differ in their views of appropriate sexual behavior and practice for young people. Often clarification of attitudes may be necessary and here, again, the advice of people you have come to know and trust is very valuable. Knowledge about the people you socialize with is important, and this is acquired best through increasing knowledge of the culture. Equally important are your own values and beliefs regarding your behavior. In societies where some young people are sexually active, there are also many who are not.

You may be unsure in some situations if you are being sexually harassed or if a particular person's behavior would be considered normally friendly. Brazilians tend to be affectionate and expressive. Body language is widely spread as well as touching the interlocutor arms, shoulders, hands, while talking even if it is the first time they met each other. Nevertheless, an important resource is your own instinct. Also, often your host siblings/parents and friends will be able to advise you about normal behavior of people you do not know. Other resources to whom you can ask for advice or help are the teachers at school, the AFS contacts within your community or at the National Office.

You should be aware of the possibility of sexual harassment in crowded public transportation (buses, subways and trains), or walking alone in some areas or town. The person may say rude words or lewd things or attempt to touch you. If it happens, try to get away, and shout for help (*socorro!*). You may also try to call the attention of other people, passers-by or a policeman.

In the event of a sexual attack, please tell your host parents what has happened. They will immediately contact the AFS local chapter coordinator or other representatives who will assist you in reporting the situation to the local police authorities and will take you to a doctor. AFS Brazil's national office will be notified and will tell your host parents what to do next.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

We strongly discourage you from involving yourself in casual sex or visiting prostitute houses. Statistics show the increased number of cases of venereal diseases and the spread of AIDS. For sexually active people the use of condoms is a MUST. Always be aware that being sexually active may have unwanted consequences and AIDS may be a very unfortunate one. Be careful and adopt a very responsible attitude in regards to the way you conduct your sexual life.

“DENGUE”

It is a disease carried by the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito with symptoms including fever, headache, weakness, rash, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and muscle pain. It has four known serotypes and the disease can be benign or serious, depending on the form it presents itself. An early diagnosis is extremely helpful in order to avoid complications. There is no vaccination available yet, but trials are under way.

In the Americas, dengue fever has been recorded for over 200 years. Some Brazilian states usually face a rise of dengue cases during the summer due to higher rainfall and warmer weather typical of this period of the year.

Primary prevention of dengue mainly resides in eliminating or reducing the mosquito vector for dengue. Initiatives to eradicate pools of standing water (such as in flowerpots) have proven useful in controlling mosquito borne diseases. Covering of the exposed skin and the use of repellent are also commonly recommended as preventive measures.

If dengue is suspected, the patient should not take medicines that have acetylsalicylic acid as one of its components, like aspirin. "Paracetamol" preparations should be taken instead. However, if one presents with one or more dengue symptoms he/she should look for immediate medical assistance.

THE POLICE

In Brazil, depending on the region and community, the police may not be very reliable. Also, in order to affirm their authority in the dangerous areas, policemen on duty in these places tend to be rude and sometimes do not respect basic rights. Ask your family how reliable is the police in your host community and which precautionary advice you should take in account whenever dealing with them.

It is important that if you find yourself being questioned by the police or other civil authority officer, you show respect and cooperation with them, even though you may be innocent of any crime and think you are being treated unfairly. In such a situation, it is unlikely that you will understand what is being said by the authority figure. In general, the best advice would be to say that you do not understand what is happening and identify yourself as an exchange participant. It is advisable for participants to always carry their Brazilian Identification Card. This is important not only in the event of being questioned by authorities, but also in the unfortunate event of a personal accident or if you become the victim of a crime and may not be able to effectively communicate.

In most Brazilian cities, there are no curfews set by municipal authorities. Young people are allowed to be in the streets late at night. For this reason, we strongly recommend you to ask your host family about the time they want you to be back home. Also, it is possible that they wish you to be accompanied with someone else if you are outside the house until late at night. Please follow your host family rules about this issue.

EMERGENCIES

In the event of a personal emergency, please call the following phone numbers in the order:

1. host family
2. local AFS volunteer

3. AFS National Office (21) 3724-4464 during business hours or (21) 9615 6499 - after business hours

Please ask your host family for the following phone numbers and keep them in your personal phone book: neighborhood police station (delegacia do bairro), fire department and a reliable local hospital or family doctor.

In the event of a natural disaster, do whatever is indicated by your host family or AFS local volunteer. AFS Brazil's national office will contact you at your host family's house or school in order to be sure that you are safe and will send a report to your sending country's national office.

REGISTRATION WITH YOUR EMBASSY OR CONSULATE

All embassies recommend that any citizen of their country who will reside in Brazil for more than 3 months register with the embassy or the nearest consular office. Registration confirms your identity as a citizen of your home country and may make it easier to provide you with assistance in emergency situations. They usually require your original passport or a photocopy of the description pages and a photograph. Be prepared as you probably have expenses. It is possible that some of them charge a fee or require your presence for your registration.

At your earliest convenience after your arrival, ask your host family what's the phone number of the Embassy or nearest Consulate of your country in Brazil (you can also check this information in the following website: www.consulados.com.br) and contact them in order to get precise instructions about registration.

CONCLUSION

The best general advice AFS can recommend regarding issues of personal safety are:

- get to know the host culture well through questions, dialogue and discussion with your host family, peers, teachers, the AFS local contacts.
- take seriously any concerns that your host family and host institution have expressed and follow their advice.
- do not ignore your own "instinct" in any given situation or feel you have to compromise your own personal behavioral values and beliefs. These are valuable resources in making decisions about what to do.

Keep these tips in mind and enjoy your stay in Brazil!