

# SAFETY TIPS

## for Year Program /Semester students THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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### Introduction

A primary objective of experiential learning programs such as those offered by AFS is to help the participant learn through observation, questions, dialogue, discussion and experience. From experience AFS staff and volunteers understand that the opportunity to learn is great, but it is not necessarily easy. Participants encounter complex situations along the way and there is a potential for confusion, fear and misunderstanding. If students were left to their own devices, the consequences could be very distressing. For these reasons with the help of host families, local AFS contacts and school personnel, AFS has devised the system of „program support“ for all participants providing a wide range of supportive activities and services. The purpose is to provide a “safety net” a consistently supportive environment in which participants can ask questions, obtain advice and help.

It is not possible to try to anticipate all possible situations pertaining to individual safety concerns. Many of these issues are specific to individual countries or parts of a single country. Many of the common sense things you do in your country may not apply in the Czech Republic. In general, the family is not likely to know what you are worried about and needs to be informed about this by you. For example, it would be useful to make direct questions such as "I have heard it is unsafe to walk around outside after dark, is this true here? Is it safe to wear my jewellery to school?"

Following topics and general suggestions can help to guide participants towards asking appropriate questions their host families and/or contact persons.

### Personal safety concerns in and around the home

- Do they lock the door and windows? All the times?
- What to do when you are leaving home last - should you close windows, lock the door?
- What should you do when a stranger comes to your home and you are alone - should you answer the door, receive deliveries?
- If you receive a house key, be careful not to lose it.
- Where should you go when you get lost or nobody is at home and you don't have a key?
- What should you do in case of an emergency, where are the important numbers listed?
- What to do in case of fire or accident? Does the family have first aid equipment and a fire extinguisher?
- Never give to a stranger your address or any personal details. Ask what kind of information you shouldn't give out.
- Should you answer the phone? If so, what information can you give?

Making phone calls is very expensive, so agree with your host family at the very beginning on a reasonable time limit for phone calls. In case you need to make an international phone call use collect call. It is also a good idea to buy a phone card, which is available in any post office or magazine's shops. You should ask your host family at the very beginning how to use the phone, how often, how to contact anyone in case of emergency etc.

## Outside home

Ask your host family about any situation in which you feel uncertain or frightened. They know the most about the community and are best prepared to give you advice how to get around.

When you are going out make sure that your host family knows your plans - where you are going, with whom and when you are coming back. If it is possible leave the phone number or address of the home you are visiting.

Czech Republic is a rather safe country but like any other country, you should be cautious : there may be some places in local areas where you should avoid going, you should always be careful about your belongings (cameras, bags, books, etc) – especially in big cities while using a public transportation. A good way to do this is to watch carefully what the other members of your family do, how they dress, what kinds of jewellery they use and when. Find out some of the local security habits by talking to them.

In general, you should try to avoid being alone late at night: if you are walking make sure that the roads are well lit and are used by local people. Avoid lonely roads; don't go to train stations late at night unless you have to because these places might be dangerous. When walking in crowded areas you should take care of your valuables because pick pocketing is more common in crowded areas, especially on buses.

- Is it safe to walk around your neighbourhood after dark?
- Which areas in your host community are/aren't safe for you at night/at daytime?
- How do buses, trams etc. run, is it safe in public transport at all times of the day?
- Is it appropriate and safe to wear jewellery and/or "expensive" clothes in your neighbourhood and to school?
- What should you do when you get lost or separated from your friends? How to use public phones?
- Is there a curfew in the family? What should you do when you miss your bus; tram etc. and you are not able to come back on time?
- When going for a trip we advise to call your host family as soon as you arrive at your destination so that they won't be worried.
- It is important to look after personal possessions in day-to-day situations and while travelling.
- In general, you should take seriously the advice of your host family and follow their recommendations.

In case you get lost, the most important thing is not to panic! It would be best not to go too far away from familiar surroundings. If you get lost ask for a way or phone your host family. Czechs in general are very helpful.

## At school

- What are studying habits in the Czech Republic?
- Is there anything you should know about high school culture?
- Make sure to ask about school rules and safety issues.
- What should you do if you know that someone is using drugs?
- Are there any activities, places or people in your school community to avoid?

Take care of your personal things and do not leave your valuable personal belongings around in the classroom

- Smoking is usually not allowed at schools
- It is usual to change shoes to slippers when entering the school.

### In social situations

- Are there any activities, people or places to avoid?
- What should you find out about party, rock concert before deciding to go? Try to find out as much as you can about the event. Your host parents, siblings, friends or teachers can give you more information.
- Some parents (acting in the place of natural parents) can decide that you should not attend an event. You should respect their advice, even if you know others are going.
- How to get out of an uncomfortable social situation? What to do if you are not comfortable at a party and want to leave early etc.? What excuses should you give?
- What do you do if you are dependent on a driver who has consumed alcohol? What alternatives are there for getting home?
- If you want to leave a party early will your parents agree to come and pick you up? Can you use public transport? Can you call a taxi?

### How to handle sexual harassment

- Cultures differ in their views of appropriate sexual behaviour 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 socialise with is important, and this is best acquired through an increasing awareness of the culture. Equally important are your own values and beliefs regarding your own behaviour.
- You may be unsure in some situations if you are being sexually harassed or if a particular person's behaviour would normally be considered friendly. If you feel uncomfortable with someone else's behaviour or you feel you have been exposed to sexual harassment speak about it with your host family, contact AFS office or your contact person immediately if possible.

Sexual harassment is likely to happen in any country. Females especially are subject to harassment. For example, if a guy or group of guys whistle at a female student, she should avoid contact with them; she should ignore them and walk away. If a car pulls up on the curb alongside a female student, she should carry on walking and not get in.

Young people might be subject to an assault (in crowded places). Try to avoid this by moving away from the person or by loudly yelling at the person to intimidate him. Also wear discreet clothing and do not go to isolated places with people that you don't know well.

In the event of an actual assault, the student should first notify the host parents. Then the host family can take over and notify the police and AFS local chapter or/and national office and arrange for a medical check-up.

If you realise that someone is following you, try to go into a public place (a bar, a shop, a restaurant) and ask someone for help.

### Drugs, Alcohol

All AFS students are forbidden to use drugs not prescribed for medical purposes. Violation of this rule is a cause for dismissal from the program and immediate return home, as can be abuse of alcohol. You need to remember this policy, should you find yourself in a situation where illegal drugs are being used or where there is excessive consumption of alcohol.

- How should you respond if other young people are pressuring you to have a drink or take drugs and you do not want to?
- Don't go in a car with any person who consumed alcohol or doesn't have a driving license (it is forbidden by the Czech law). If you are dependant on such a person you should contact your host family, who advice you what to do to get home. Remember that hitchhiking is also forbidden.
- All AFS students and their natural families are fully responsible for damages caused by participants to third parties and any cost involved in connection with such claims. AFS does not assume legal liability for participants.
- AFS students are subject to the law of the hosting country. Neither AFS nor the national government of the student's home country has the ability to protect the student from punishment with respect to drug, theft and other legal offences.

### Road signs, Traffic

- Czechs drive their cars on the right side of the street.
- Pedestrians should always use crosswalks or traffic lights when willing to cross the street.
- When there is no pavement you should use the left side of the road for walking.
- When there are no traffic lights, it is not always kept that drivers give you the way when You are going to cross the street. Make sure to have a look beforehand.
- Public transport has different schedules depending on the time of the day.
- It is forbidden for AFS students to drive any motor vehicle even if he/she has a driving license.

### Emergencies

- Whom should you contact in case of an emergency to yourself or someone else? Host family? AFS office? Which are emergency phone numbers to call police/fire/ambulance?
- How do you register with your embassy or consulate?
- What is the role of police or military authorities in the Czech Republic? How should you respond when an interview with the police or other authorities occurs?
- In such 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 you don't understand what is happening and if necessary identify yourself as an exchange student. It is advisable for you to carry always your identification card and AFS office address. This is important not only in the event of being questioned by authorities, but also in an unfortunate event of a personal accident or if you become a victim of a crime and may not be able to communicate effectively.
- In case of a natural emergency such as flood, fire you should follow the advice of the local authorities or government. You will also be contacted by AFS office.

Emergency phone numbers:	Police	158
	Ambulance	155
	Firemen	150
	Emergency in general	112

- Every student should carry identification all the time. We suggest that you make a copy of your passport (including the seal with the date you entered the country) and AFS ID you receive. We recommend that you carry these photocopies with you.
- Be careful with your passport, as in some cases it is very difficult and expensive to get another one and it could cause a lot of confusion and bureaucratic problems.

### AFS Czech Republic Rules

At the arrival camp each student is given and explained the rules of AFS Czech Republic.

- I. When in the Czech Republic, you are subject to Czech law.
- II. AFS students are not allowed to drive a car or any other motor vehicle. This rule applies even if you have a valid driving license in your country.
- III. Hitchhiking, even in company, is strictly forbidden.
- IV. AFS students are not allowed to travel on an Inter Rail Card in Europe.
- V. Any involvement with drugs (including cannabis) - using, selling or possessing - is strictly prohibited.
- VI. Consumption of alcohol should be in accordance with the host families' habits. In the Czech Republic it is illegal to sell alcohol to persons under 18.
- VII. Visits of relatives and friends are not recommended, because those visits might have a negative influence on both the participant and on the relations between the participant and the host family.  
In exceptional cases permission from the AFS Mezikulturní programy may be given for the visit, but the student's host family must be informed and agree to the visit.  
Trips with your natural family or acquaintances are not allowed.
- VIII. Regular school attendance is a basic part of AFS program and therefore compulsory. Any absence from school must be excused by the host parents or by a doctor, as it is the case with the Czech students.

### TRAVEL RULES:

Travelling is not recommended as the AFS programs are school-based and orientated to home-stay.

IT IS ALLOWED TO...

- travel with adult members of your host family;
- travel under the leadership of a teacher if it is a part of school activities;
- travel with an AFS-approved group with at least one adult member (sports club, language school, etc.);
- travel independently after January 1<sup>st</sup> after giving the details of the planned trip to the AFS office in Prague

IT IS NOT ALLOWED TO...

- travel to your home country;
- travel independently before January 1<sup>st</sup>;
- travel without a permission from your host family and school (on weekdays);

- plan any individual travel prior to a consent from the national AFS office in Praha (also in order to avoid any loss of money on bookings and reservations);

#### INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

- after January 1<sup>st</sup>; you can travel alone with the permission of your host family for a period shorter than 48 hours (a weekend, after giving the details of the planned trip to the AFS office in Prague ).

#### INDEPENDENT TRAVEL FOR PERIOD LONGER THAN 48 HOURS

- is strongly discouraged;
- can only be done upon an official AFS Program Release Waiver signed by your natural parents;
- it is necessary to have a permission from AFS Mezikulturní programy, host family and school (if interfering with it);
- is forbidden before January 1<sup>st</sup>;

If all the conditions are fulfilled AFS Mezikulturní programy permits ONE independent travel for a period of maximum 9 days (including the journey). Therefore decide carefully where and when you want to travel to.

- Basically, AFS “always” has to know where you are or where you can be reached if an emergency arises.
- If you do not follow the AFS rules as stated above permission for the trip may be refused (even if tickets and reservations have already been paid for).

BREAKING ANY OF THESE RULES OR ANY OTHER UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR WILL BE CONSIDERED  
AS A REASON FOR EARLY RETURN.

### Conclusion

- Take seriously any concerns that your host family and school have expressed and follow their advice and recommendations.
- Get to know the host culture and the language well through questions, dialogue and discussions with your host family, peers and the AFS local contacts.
- Do not ignore your own “instinct” in any given situation or feel you have to compromise your own personal behavioural values and beliefs. These are valuable resources in making decisions about what to do.
- More information will be provided to you once you are settled in the Czech Republic.
- Do remember to raise the issue of safety practices with your family.  
Don't hesitate and ask!