

Guidelines for Participants' Personal Safety



***AFS Magyarország
Nemzetközi Csereprogram
Alapítvány***

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INTRODUCTION

A primary objective of experimental learning programs such as those offered by AFS is to help the participant learn through observation, question, 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 the potential for confusion, fear and misunderstanding. If students were left to their own devices, the consequences could be very unfortunate. For these reasons with the help of host families, members of local communities, 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 get help.

AFS cannot supply all the possible answers, but through our support system, we can help to guide participants towards asking the appropriate questions. It is not possible to try and anticipate all possible situations pertaining to individual safety concerns. Many of these issues are specific to individual countries or parts of a single country. In general, AFS recommends talking with the host family, AFS local committee members and staff from the host school soon after the student arrives into the home of the host family about any of the information in this guidebook and questions students may have about specific personal issues.

AFS suggests that students ask their host family about specific situations about which they are concerned or worried, about recognising that most of the information about the host country is prevalent in movies and in media publications, and that may not be accurate for the country or the specific area of the country in which the family lives.

Within this context, the following are some topics and general suggestions.

TOPIC ONE - PERSONAL SAFETY CONCERNS

In or around the home

General advice by AFS International:

In general, the family is not likely to know what your worries are, and needs to be informed about them by you. For example, such questions 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?".

In general, AFS encourages you to ask the family about the way they secure their home, for example: do they lock the doors and the windows? All the time? How should you respond when a stranger to the family comes to the door? Will you receive a house key? Who can you call if you arrive home without a key or if there is no one in the house? Your neighbours? Which ones? What should you do in case of a fire? What does your family advise about answering the door when you are home alone?

Host families will usually explain their policy on making telephone calls to you, but may not realize that you may have concerns about how to answer the telephone, especially if you are not yet comfortable in using the language of the host country and are not yet familiar with people who may be calling. AFS encourages you to ask your host parents how you should respond when answering the phone. What information should you give? What information should you not give?

Specific information and instruction by AFS Hungary:

People use electrical and gas objects in the household. In Hungary we use 220 Volts/1 Ampere which is dangerous enough to kill you. Many households use gas for cooking and for heating (water, fireplace) and this material is explosive.

In Hungary people lock their doors and windows before leaving the house. When answering the door you should always make sure who is at the door by looking through the peephole. If it is a stranger, you should not let him/her in; rather tell him/her to come back later. If you get a key you must be very careful, not to lose it!

Making phone-calls are very expensive, so agree with your host family on a reasonable time limit for phone calls. We suggest you that you buy a phone-card, which is available in any post-office. You should ask your host family from the very beginning how to use the phone and how to contact anyone in case of emergency; for example, a relative, the fire department, police, ambulance, etc. When calling your home-country you may want to use a phonecard for a prepared calling card. Ask your chapter president or AFS staff members if you want to buy a prepared calling card! Calling home through Internet is much cheaper than normal phone.

Ask your family what information should not be given out and to whom. You should never give out the family's address, phone number or financial information to someone you do not know well.

Outside the home:

General advice by AFS International:

In some countries or in communities where there may have been incidents of crime or violence, (burglaries, purse snatching, thefts, assault, pick pocketing), there may be public service organisations (schools, the police, community organisations) advising local residents about the problem and giving recommendations regarding personal safety. Students should read what is available, share it with their host family and ask for any clarification. In general, if such information is not available, AFS encourages you to let your host parents know whenever you are concerned or frightened. Ask them what they recommend to help you feel more personally secure. When you are going out, AFS suggests that you leave the information about where you are going or the telephone number of where you will be at home. Your host family knows the most about their community and is best prepared to give you advice about the places it would be better for you to avoid and how best to get around. In general, you should take their advice seriously and follow their recommendations.

Specific information and instructions by AFS Hungary:

The student should ask the host family, friends, or AFS which part of the town are dangerous and at what time of the day. Participants are expected to follow advice about places or activities, which they should avoid. The general advice is for the students that they should not be hanging around, or taking public transport and taxi alone at night.

In the school:

Specific information and instructions by AFS Hungary:

Smoking is usually not allowed in schools. Usually there is no uniform in the schools. Drugs in school amongst students are invisible and fairly uncommon. It is unlikely that the AFS student will encounter illegal drugs in the school.

Do not leave your valuable personal belongings around in the classroom expecting that everyone else is going to look after them. When leaving the room take your money and any valuable belongings with you.

TOPIC TWO - OTHER SITUATIONS

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 until you can ask for directions in Hungarian. If you get lost you will find the Hungarians very helpful. You can also ask a policeman, a bus driver or a taxi driver, they are also quite kind and may have a map as well. In Budapest you can find a map in every metro station.

Regarding public transport & traffic rules:

It is safe to use public transport. Before getting on a bus, a tram, the metro or a trolley bus make sure that you have your ticket and you validated it; and always take care of your belongings. Late in the evening it is less advisable to use public transportation alone.

Hungarians drive their car on the right side of the street, and right hand rule is applied when giving first way. Pedestrians should always use a crosswalk and pay attention to the traffic lights.

Going out at night:

Before leaving tell your host parents where you are going and when you will be back. It is important that you check whether there is a way to get home (departure of the last buses, trams, etc.). Public transportation stops running at around 11:00 p.m. in bigger cities. You should arrange with your host family, who is going to pick you up to get home. When taking a taxi, make sure it belongs to a taxi company - you can see the agency name on the car side -, because private taxis can be very expensive. In Budapest the most reliable taxi agencies are the following: "Taxi 2000", "Volán taxi" and "City taxi". You are not supposed to walk alone on the streets at night.

The possession of weapons:

It is illegal to possess any weapon unless you have a license. A knife with a blade longer than 8 cm is considered to be a weapon.

TOPIC THREE - UNCOMFORTABLE SOCIAL SITUATIONS

Laws, illegal drugs, drinking, driving:

General advice by AFS International:

All participants are forbidden to use drugs, and it is illegal 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. It is very important that you remember this when you find yourself in a situation where illegal substances are being used. The same applies to the excessive consumption of alcohol.

In general, knowing the culture is usually the best preparation for knowing how to handle uncomfortable social situations. It is also good for your host parents to meet your friends and to know whom you spend your free time with. If you are invited to a party or other event such as a rock concert or soccer game and are not sure it is safe to go, AFS recommends that you find out a little about the party or event: where is it being held and who will be there. Usually, your host sibling, parents, friends or teachers at school can give information about the event and the people who are expected to attend. Some host parents may also forbid students to attend certain kinds of parties, concerts, soccer games, etc. Students should respect and accept the parents' advice, even if others he/she knows are going.

Specific information and instructions by AFS Hungary:

Try not to spend a lot of money, especially because Hungarian teenagers usually do not have a lot of pocket money, and you both would feel uncomfortable. Since in Hungary prices seem relatively low, you might feel rich. Everything may seem cheap, but do not forget that the exchange rates are different. Try not to cause extra costs for both of your families.

Participants 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 their 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.

Identification & Passport:

Every student should carry identification documents all the time. We suggest that you make a copy of your passport (including the seal with the date you entered the country). You will also receive a Hungarian student card provided by your school, which you should keep with you always.

Be careful with your passport, as in some cases it is very difficult and expensive to get another one and this could cause a lot of confusion and bureaucratic problems.

Drinking:

18 is the legal drinking age in Hungary, so normally students under 18 may not be served in a public place. At home you should follow your host family's rules and the AFS committee's rules. We recommend you not to accept drinks or cigarettes from people you do not know very well.

Driving:

As an AFS student you are not permitted to drive. In Hungary a person must be 18 years old to get a driving license. We suggest that the AFS students do not get in any motor vehicle with a younger driver or someone without a license or with someone who has consumed any alcohol (in the Hungarian law it is strictly forbidden). If you are in this situation, you should contact your host family or someone from AFS, and they will tell you what to do to get home or a place where you should go. Remember - hitchhiking is also forbidden!

Sexual harassment:

General advice by AFS International:

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 just be considered to be friendly. Your own instinct is an important resource. Also, your host siblings/parents and friends will often be able to give you advice about normal behaviour of people you do not know. Other people to whom you can turn for advice or help are teachers at school and the AFS contacts within your community, or at the National Office.

Specific information and instructions by AFS Hungary:

Sexual harassment can happen almost in any country; however Hungary is not a dangerous place. Females especially are subject to harassment. It is not a problem if guys whistle after a female student, but avoid contact with them by not looking at them. If a car pulls up beside a student, don't get in. A young girl might be subject to an assault on a crowded bus. Try to avoid this by taking another bus, by moving away from the person or by loudly yelling at the person to intimidate him. Responsible

behavior is expected from adolescent girls and boys. For example, you should be polite towards elderly people and should wear discreet clothing.

In the event of an actual assault the student should first notify the host parents. Then the family can take over and notify the police, AFS, and arrange for a medical check-up. If calling the host family fails, this number should be called in any emergency: **(06-30) 9223 457**.

If you realise that someone is following you, try to go to a public place (a shop, a buffet, a coffee house, etc.) and ask someone there for help or if you are being followed and are on a bus (especially outside of Budapest or in the countryside), ask the driver for help. He could open and close the door quickly for you and not let the stranger get off at the same stop.

Kissing each other on the cheek is considered rather normal when meeting friends or family members. Personal distance between people, or touching the other's shoulder or arm may vary, depending on the region or the person's cultural background.

TOPIC FOUR - EMERGENCIES

General advice by AFS International:

The role of the military or police authorities may vary from country to country. Each country is different.

In most countries adolescent boys are more likely than girls to find themselves being questioned by the police or other civil authority officers. AFS advises that you show respect and cooperate with authorities, 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 student. It is advisable for students to always carry photocopy of their passport and visa. 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.

Specific information and instructions by AFS Hungary:

In case of an emergency the student should first call the host family, a relative or a close friend. Then the local AFS person and the National AFS Office should be called. The number for the AFS Hungary office in Budapest is **(1) 225-0826**. After the working hours (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) an operator will answer your call and you can leave a message. In emergency the following number must be dialled **(06-30) 922-3457**.

The official emergency contact number for the **ambulance is 104**, for the **fire department 105**, and for the **police 107**. Another general emergency number is **112**, which can be called from mobile phone from everywhere.

We recommend that the students carry a photocopy of their passport and the residence permit.

In case of a national emergency such as an earthquake, the students should follow the advice of the government or the local authorities. The National AFS office will immediately contact the students in order to provide the necessary help.

AFS Hungary sends a list of the students' names to the respective embassies located in the country, so that the students will be registered at each embassy.

AFS RULES AND POLICIES

1. No driving!
2. No hitchhiking!
3. No drugs!

Disobeying these three rules results in being sent home.

4. Please note that AFS is not a tourist program. Students are not allowed to travel alone. If students go abroad they need permission from AFS Hungary, hostfamily and natural parents.

5. Attending school is mandatory. You are supposed to follow the rules of your school.

6. You are fully responsible for yourself, your actions and sexual behaviour.

7. Drinking is generally not accepted.

8. In case of any problems contact your local AFS counselor or the national office.

9. Students must inform host family about where they are. You must follow the AFS travel rules! You always have to inform your host family about your travel plans, whereabouts and ask for their permission for any travel. Keep the curfews agreed on with your host family, and the way/means of transportation you get home should be approved by your host family before you go out.

The above rules are in power for securing the safety of the AFS participants and the goals of AFS intercultural programs. If you break any of them it may cause for a termination and an early return from the AFS program.

In case of any problems contact your local AFS counsellor or the National Office.

CONCLUSION

The best general advices AFS can give regarding issues of personal safety are:

- ♣ get to know the host culture and the language well through questions, dialogue and discussion with your host family, peers, and the AFS local contacts;
- ♣ take seriously any concerns that your host family and school have expressed and follow their advice;
- ♣ as stated in the Agreement document you signed prior to leaving home, the National AFS Office will make recommendations and give guidelines for physical welfare and security. Take this advice seriously and comply with these guidelines;
- ♣ do not ignore your own "instinct" in any given situation or feel you have to compromise your own personal behaviour, values, or beliefs. These are valuable resources in making decisions about what to do.

More information will be provided to the coming students once they are settled in their host country.