

Characteristics, Customs, Beliefs and Norms in Switzerland

Families

1. In many families the children and parents will want to know *where* they are going *when* they will be home. Written messages and phone calls are quite common.
2. Punctuality is important in Switzerland. 2 o'clock means 2 o'clock, if you arrive at 10 past 2, you are late. Changing plans is not always appreciated.
3. It is not accepted to borrow personal belongings from members of the family without asking permission – and the answer may be 'no'.
4. A certain amount of privacy is important to Swiss teenagers. Children and teenagers have a lot of liberty and possibilities forming their free time and their daily life but they have to respect the rules given from the parents. They are an equal partner in the family life under the condition that they respect the parent`s authority in certain areas.
5. An outspoken hierarchy among sisters and brothers is a rare sight in Swiss families, and the older sisters and brothers are not always expected to protect and educate the younger ones. Boys and girls have the same social position in the family. It is not common that the brother has to guide or protect his sisters.
6. When grandparents grow old, it is not common for them to move in with the younger generations. If they cannot take care of themselves, they move into nursing homes or they receive help from the local community.
7. Many Swiss families have pets (cats, dogs, birds, etc) which they may treat with extreme affection.
8. TV is not turned on all day and in most families never during meals. Most families will have rules on using TV and PC.
9. In most families – especially the younger generation – housework is shared, and hardly any families have maids. It is not unusual that men do the cooking – in fact cooking is a compulsory subject in the 8th or 9th grade at school. Men will also do laundry and other housework, and boys and girls share all practical work evenly at home and when participating in school camps etc.
10. Often families try to have a meal together once a day or they have other “rituals” to cultivate their family-life. Many families also have a family calendar where they plan their common activities.
11. Swiss people are often ecologically conscious and they don't like waste. Garbage is separated for recycling.
12. To leave food on the plate after a meal is only accepted if the meal has been served in portions. When helping oneself, it is considered polite to finish everything.
13. Tap water is clean in Switzerland and it is very common that families will serve you tap water. Not all families will be willing to buy cokes and lemonades for you as they are considered unhealthy or as unnecessary luxury.

14. Although most Swiss are conscious about using water, we use hot water for washing the dishes, clothes and people. Many families have dish washing machines and most families have washing machines.
15. Birthdays are special days. People receive gifts and many families have special rituals such as serving birthday cakes, singing a birthday song, having a birthday party etc. It is polite - and expected – to open gifts in front of the giver and say thank you.
16. Most of the Swiss teenagers don't dress up for school. Wearing the same clothes for more than one day is common, as long as they are not dirty or stink.
17. In the house, the Swiss take off their shoes and walk in socks or house shoes.
18. Since our climate is not very hot, showering more than once daily is not common. In the morning, the bathroom is busy used by all the family. Occupying the bathroom for more than 10-15 minutes is not accepted during that time.
19. Bathrooms are always dry – water on the floor is not accepted.
20. Laundry is often sorted according to colors and fabrics – not according to which part of the body it is worn.
21. After use, the toilet paper is thrown into the toilet, and never into a wastebasket. It is important to keep the toilet clean using the toilet brush.

Attitude towards Education and Leisure

1. It is common for Swiss teenagers to have great personal freedom. Many Swiss parents will often spend a lot of time talking about their beliefs and expectations to their children in order to give them what we call 'freedom with responsibility'. This does not mean that parents will accept all kinds of behavior from their children, but the rules may seem very unclear to people who are unfamiliar with our society.
2. Swiss parents and teachers encourage children to be independent and to form their own opinions. Discussions between parents/teachers and children are therefore acceptable.
3. Swiss parents show their love with trust, accepting the children with their opinions and allowing them a lot of freedom. Most parents discuss conflict openly and physical punishment is not accepted.
4. It is not common that children are served breakfast at the bed or served other meals by the mother or driven around with a car. Children that don't organize themselves and let themselves be served are considered spoiled.
5. Respect for older people is not emphasized a lot when bringing up children.

6. Although education is considered very important, parents will want their children to also spend time with friends and participate in after school activities, such as sports, music, scout groups etc. The ability to socialize with other people is considered important.
7. It is very common to share the costs of an outing or a date.
8. It is common for teenagers to have jobs after school to earn their own pocket money. How much pocket money they get from the parents depends on the childrens age and the agreement inside the families (sometimes teenagers get more pocket money so they can pay their clothes and some food on their own).

Alcohol and Smoking

1. Most Swiss handle alcohol in a relaxed way. Many families find it socially acceptable that teenagers drink as long as they can control themselves. Beer and wine will be available for students older than 16 years, hard drinks for those who are older then 18 years.
2. Smoking is common among Swiss teenagers.

Sex

1. Nakedness does not necessarily signal sex. Wearing little clothes and bikinis in summer is common.
2. Friendships between girls and boy are very common. Having a date with a boy/girl does not necessary mean that he/she is interested in sex.
3. Holding hands with people of the opposite sex is quite common.
4. It is acceptable to show affection in public to a person of the opposite sex.
5. Sex before marriage is accepted. Therefore, many couples live together without being married, and many parents accept overnight visits by their teenage children's boy or girl friend.
6. Sexual guidance is a compulsory subject in Swiss schools – including information on contraception, AIDS etc.
7. Couples of the same sex are accepted and occasionally seen in public.

Visiting People

1. When visiting people in their homes we take off our jackets or coats to show that we intend not to leave right away. Often we also take off our shoes not to bring in dirt.
2. It is common that children and teenagers spend time together at each other's homes playing, talking, listening to music, having tea etc. in the child's or teenager's own room.

Behavior

1. Nose blowing is accepted, but sniffing is generally not accepted.
2. It is accepted to show your feelings to a certain extent –most Swiss do not like to exaggerate. Most Swiss do not smile when they are sad, angry, or worried.
3. Saying “thank you” is very important in Switzerland. We say thank you for every gift or special treatment we got, but also in restaurants and small shops when we receive a service.
4. Most Swiss will give a direct answer to a question – if we mean ‘no’ we say it!
5. Avoiding eye contact is interpreted as a sign of insecurity and weakness.
6. An extended system of public transportation and a relatively safe society makes getting around very easy. It is therefore common for teenagers to go on their own visiting friends, going to the movies, concerts, etc.

Politics

1. A lot of Swiss are proud of their political system because they have some sorts of direct democracy. Your family will be happy if you are interested to know about the political system. Further information about the political system in Switzerland you can find under www.parlament.ch.