



Connecting Lives, Sharing Cultures

Safety Tips for the USA

A guide for AFS Participants hosted in the U.S.



Please bring this
handbook to your Arrival
Orientation in the U.S.

Table of Contents

Important Contact Information.....	3
AFS-USA Chain of Communication.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Practical Information for Living in the U.S.....	6
Rules and Regulations.....	7
The Three AFS Rules.....	7
No Drugs.....	7
A Note about Marijuana.....	7
A Note about Prescription Drugs.....	7
No Driving.....	8
No Hitchhiking.....	9
Alcohol Use and Smoking.....	9
Alcohol Policy for Participants in the U.S.....	9
Smoking.....	11
Body Piercing and Tattoos.....	11
The Legal System in the U.S.....	11
Other Risky Behaviors that may be considered a Reason for Program Termination or Early Return.....	11
Your Host Family.....	11
Safety Inside the Home.....	12
Telephone.....	12
Answering the Door.....	13
Locking Doors and Windows.....	13
Internet Usage.....	13
Firearms.....	14
Safety Outside the Home.....	14
General Precautions.....	14
Threatening Situations.....	15
Transportation.....	15
Safety in School.....	18
Seasonal Flu Advisory.....	18
Endemic Illness Advisory.....	19
Weather.....	20
Hurricanes.....	22
Earthquakes.....	24
Emergencies.....	25
Personal Safety.....	25
Teen Pregnancy.....	27
Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).....	28
HIV and AIDS Information.....	29
Preventing & Identifying Sexual Harassment.....	31
Protecting Yourself from Sexual Abuse.....	32
What Constitutes Sexual Abuse?.....	32
True or False Quiz.....	32
Tips for Preventing & Dealing with Sexual Abuse.....	33
Answers to the True and False Quiz.....	33
How To Get Help.....	33

Important Contact Information

AFS-USA
120 Wall Street, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10005

1-800-AFS-INFO
(800-237-4636)

Host Family

Name(s): _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

Local Liaison

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

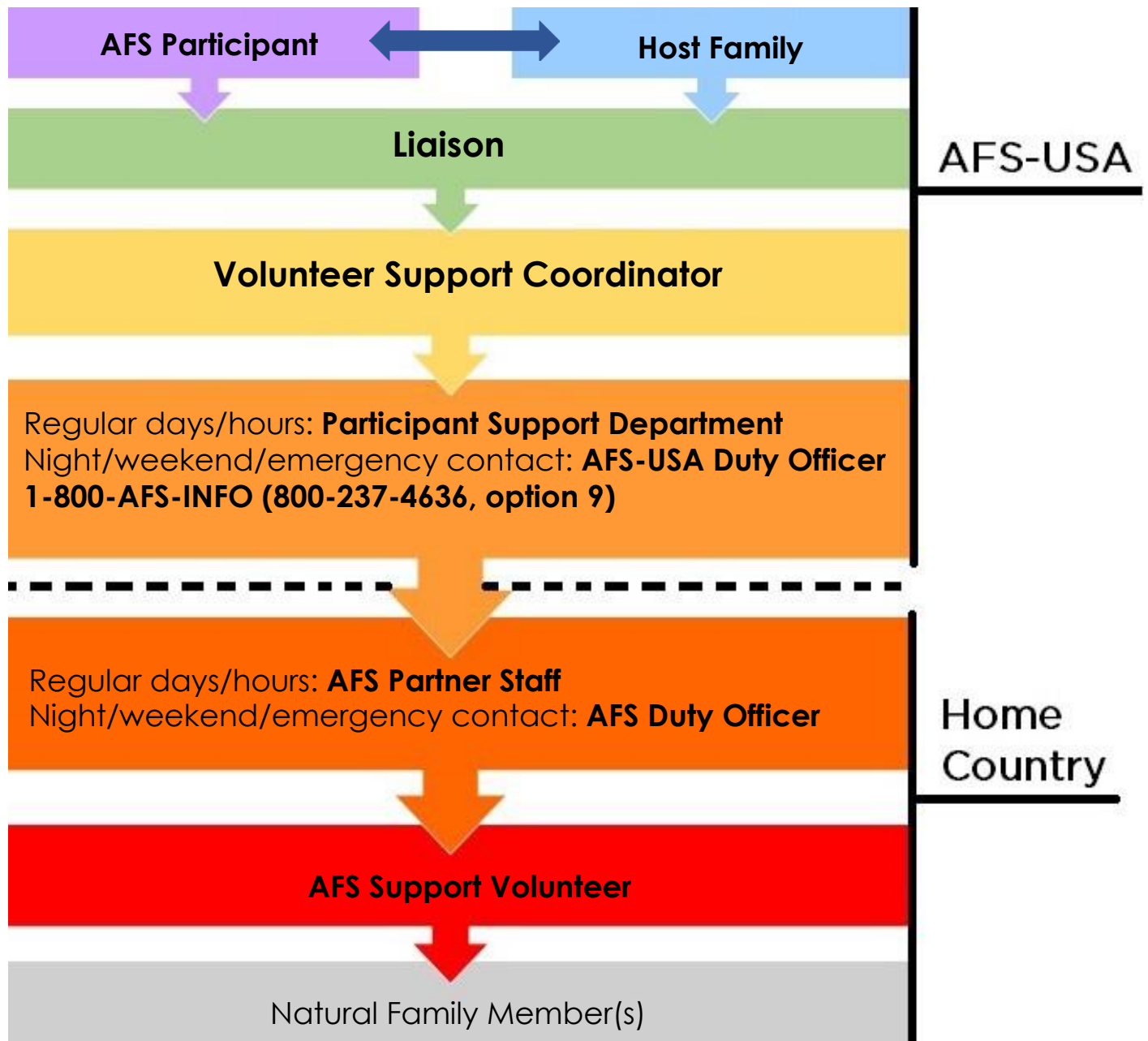
Emergency Phone Numbers

AFS Emergency Line	1-800-AFS-INFO (800-237-4636) & dial 9
National Emergency Line	9-1-1
Poison Control	1-800-222-1222
Police Department	
Fire Department	
Doctor	

Please use blank lines for additional contact information.

AFS-USA

Chain of Communication



Introduction

Most of what you learn while on the AFS program you will discover through your everyday interactions and experiences at home, in school, and in your host community. AFS staff and volunteers understand that the opportunity to learn while on the AFS program is great, but not always easy. You may encounter situations during your stay that you find confusing, frustrating, or even a little scary.

In order to help you learn from these challenging times, AFS has created a system of "Program Support" for all participants. The purpose of this support system is to provide a safety net for you, a safe environment in which you may ask questions, seek advice, and receive help.

AFS alone cannot prepare every participant for all possible safety concerns, as many issues will be specific to the community in which you are placed. Therefore, we recommend that you talk to the individuals who make up your "safety net" (your host family, local AFS volunteers, and school staff) about the issues raised in this handbook soon after you arrive in the U.S.

AFS staff and volunteers know that the image of the U.S. that is often portrayed by the international media may be different than the reality in the community in which you are hosted. Therefore, we encourage you to ask your host family to clarify any concerns or doubts you may have about life in your host community.

Maintaining your safety is our number one priority at AFS. However, it is your responsibility to make smart, informed decisions in order to keep yourself safe. Reading all of the information contained in this handbook and *Welcome to the USA* will help prepare you to make these important decisions. After you have finished reading, be sure to discuss any additional questions or concerns you may have with your host family or AFS contact.

We wish you a safe and successful stay in the USA!



Practical Information for Living in the U.S.

We are certain that you are going to have an exciting year learning about the United States and yourself. In your own culture, you have been learning since birth to understand the best way to behave in all types of situations. Soon you will be in a new culture and you may not be aware of all the "clues" and signs telling you what is proper and acceptable. Because the U.S. is such a large and varied country, it is impossible to tell you how to behave in every situation. How you should behave often depends on the circumstances.

Many of the things you consider to be common sense in your country will apply to your stay in the U.S. The best thing to do in any situation is to discuss any concerns you have with your host family or local AFS volunteer. However, you must also be responsible for yourself.

After spending a couple of days getting to know your family, please sit down with them and discuss the information contained here. It's important to clarify with them anything you don't understand about the advice given or language used in this booklet.

Carry your AFS ID Card At All Times

Your AFS ID card contains all of the vital information that you will need in an emergency. Your ID card includes:

- Your name
- Your U.S. host family's address and telephone numbers
- Name and telephone numbers of your local AFS volunteers and the AFS National Office
- The telephone number of the U.S. Department of State's Office of Designation
- The AFS toll-free emergency telephone number
- The name of your AFS health insurance provider and policy number



Rules and Regulations

The Three AFS Rules

The following rules apply to every AFS participant hosted in the United States at all times:

No Drugs
No Driving
No Hitchhiking

If you are involved in any of these behaviors or break any other laws, you may have serious legal problems. These rules are not debatable. **If you break any of these rules, you will be returned to your home country immediately!**

No Drugs

Possession or use of drugs is not allowed by AFS, unless medically prescribed. Participants have no immunity from the laws in the United States governing use of or involvement with illegal drugs. Therefore, it is forbidden for AFS participants to consume drugs except those prescribed for medical purposes.

Violation of this rule is cause for dismissal from the program and immediate return to your home country. You should remember this if you find yourself in a situation where illegal substances are being used, where there is use of alcohol by minors, or when knowingly associating with persons using these substances.

We know that views about non-medicinal drug usage vary from state to state. Because this is an issue that can have serious consequences for participants, AFS maintains a universal policy on how to manage situations involving non-medicinal drug usage, even in states where it is legal: possession or use of drugs is not allowed, unless medically prescribed.

A Note about Marijuana

Laws related to marijuana vary from state to state. For example, it is legal in some states for individuals 21 years of age and older to use marijuana for medicinal and/or recreational purposes. **However, federal law prohibits the possession/use/sale of marijuana, and all participants coming to the U.S. are expected to abstain from having, using, or selling marijuana while on program.**

If someone offers you marijuana, even in a state where it has been legalized, do not accept it and tell your host parents and/or Liaison. Using marijuana under any circumstance is cause for dismissal from the program and immediate return to your home country.

A Note About Prescription Drugs

It is against the law to have, use, or sell drugs that were prescribed by a doctor for someone else. Penalties can be the same as those for illegal drugs. There are special penalties involved for those who possess drugs on school grounds. If someone offers you prescription drugs, as with all illegal drugs, decline them and tell your host parents and/or Liaison about the situation. Doing otherwise will put your own health at risk, as well as your participation in the AFS program.

When confronted with non-medicinal drug usage or involvement, these questions are most commonly raised:

Why does AFS terminate program participation for individuals who use or are involved with non-medicinal drugs?

It is AFS's responsibility to remove participants from situations that can hold possible criminal consequences or personal risk. AFS maintains this universal policy to ensure participants' health and safety.

What if I am not actually using drugs but I am with people who are doing so? Program participation can be cancelled if you are in the company of individuals using drugs and drug equipment or who are involved in the transport or distribution of drugs.

Your safety is the primary concern of AFS. Drug enforcement laws can be extremely severe. The police can arrest or detain an individual on suspicion of drug involvement simply by association or being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Possession or use of illegal drugs can result in arrest, jail time, and criminal charges necessitating court proceedings. In some cases, a participant's personal safety may also be at risk. If a participant is arrested, neither AFS nor the participant's country of citizenship or family can have much of an influence on the process, therefore, immediate return to the home country is in the participant's best interest. To delay this action can put the participant at risk of being detained by the police and entering into the criminal justice system, from which it can be difficult to extradite the participant.

For the reasons above, we recommend that you find out about any events (concerts, parties, etc.) you are interested in attending ahead of time. Your host sibling, parents, friends, or teachers may be able to give you more 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 events, even if others you know are going.

Why doesn't AFS depend on drug testing to prove whether or not a participant has used drugs and should be returned home?

AFS does not depend on drug testing since the process is often unreliable. For this reason, AFS maintains a strict policy against the use of or involvement with illegal drugs. Any involvement or suspicion of involvement with illegal drugs is grounds for early return home.

No Driving

AFS does not allow participants to operate any moving vehicle that requires a license. This means that all AFS participants are forbidden from driving cars (this rule applies to driving anywhere, including on private land, in driveways, and in parking lots). Participants are also forbidden from flying airplanes and driving trucks, motorcycles, motor scooters, and powered bicycles. Participants are not allowed to take a driver's education course while on the AFS program. Failure to comply with these rules is cause for termination from the program and the participant's early return to his or her home country.

Many states have recently adopted more stringent controls over the use of jet skis, wave runners, and other personal watercraft, and a license is required in many states in order to operate such vehicles. Because this requirement has become so widespread, AFS students are prohibited from driving jet skis, wave runners, and other similar personal watercraft. They may ride as a passenger if the person driving is in legal compliance with state laws regarding the operation of such watercraft.

If you wish to operate other vehicles, such as a snowmobile or tractor, you must have both your host

parents' and your natural parents' permission in writing in the form of an *AFS Activity Waiver*.

No Hitchhiking

While hitchhiking may be a common form of traveling in some countries, it is considered a potentially dangerous activity in the U.S. and therefore is not allowed.

Several other considerations have led to the **No Hitchhiking** rule:

- Hitchhiking is against State law if conducted in the customary way of standing by the roadside with a hand out asking motorist to stop to give a ride. Hitchhiking wherever it occurs is against the law in some states.
- American families generally do not allow their minor children to hitchhike. Therefore, if the participant hitchhikes it could put the placement at risk.
- The participant's ability to judge the driver's motivation to stop to give a ride or to offer a ride can be impaired due to limited understanding of host country cultural norms. Limited knowledge of the locale where the ride is offered and the route taken can also increase the risk when the decision is made to get in to a vehicle driven by someone unknown.
- AFS must consider risk to the participant and the organization should the participant suffer harm, be that abuse, a car accident or other incident that brings adverse notoriety to AFS and the Department of State.

The AFS definition of **hitchhiking**:

To seek transportation by asking strangers for a ride or accepting a ride offered by strangers in their private motor vehicle.

Key words in the definition are:

- **To seek transportation.** AFS does not consider hitchhiking an acceptable form of transportation for travel in the local community and most certainly not outside the community, which would be unauthorized independent travel.
- **Asking or accepting rides.** Asking for or accepting rides at or near the roadway or elsewhere within the community. An example of "near the roadway" is using the typical sign of arm out with the thumb up. An example of "out in the community" is at a party asking for or accepting a ride home or to another party from a stranger, as defined below.
- **Strangers.** Defined as someone the participant does not know, at first meeting, or someone that does not have a recommendation, reference or referral by someone the participant does know and trusts such as host family members, good friends or AFS volunteers.

Asking for or accepting rides from known schoolmates would not be considered **hitchhiking**. However, host parents must be given the chance to approve rides by schoolmates to ensure participant safety in riding with drivers who have might have new driver license restrictions or are considered at-risk drivers.

Alcohol Use and Smoking

Alcohol Policy for Participants in the U.S.

The safety and wellbeing of our participants is AFS's highest priority. Working to ensure the safety of a participant requires partnership between the participant and the host family, in compliance with AFS policies and laws in the host country.

Embarking on an AFS program in the U.S. implies agreement with the following alcohol policies. Failure to abide by these policies is considered to be irresponsible behavior, a threat to the safety of the AFS participant, and potentially damaging to the integrity of the program.

Failure to comply with these policies will be considered grounds for early return.

1. Use of alcohol in the United States is regulated by state and federal law. Although U.S. federal law states that no one under the age of 21 may publicly possess or purchase alcohol, state laws regarding the consumption of alcohol by a minor (anyone under 21) vary.

Some U.S. states maintain zero tolerance laws, meaning that no alcohol can be consumed or possessed by anyone under the age of 21. Other U.S. states allow consumption if it is in a private home. No matter where an AFS participant is hosted in the United States, breaking any laws is strictly prohibited. The breaking of any state or local law concerning alcohol is reason to be removed from the program and returned home. In such cases, a participant faces the possibility of arrest and/or deportation if these laws are not obeyed.

It is important that participants have a clear understanding of the laws of the state and community in which they are living. Participants should ask their host family and/or Liaison to explain their views on teenage drinking, the family rules, U.S., and state laws and how these will affect them.

2. Any abuse of alcoholic drinks, such as binge drinking and inappropriate behavior related to drinking alcohol, is not allowed while on an AFS program in the United States and is grounds for early return. Any arrest or suspension from school for alcohol use is also grounds for early return.

AFS is aware that there are American high school students who abuse alcohol and binge drink. Binge drinking means consuming several drinks on one occasion. Serious injury and death can occur from the abuse of alcohol, such as binge drinking. Binge drinking or inappropriate behavior related to drinking is not allowed while on an AFS-USA program.

It is important that AFS participants understand that excessive alcohol use is not acceptable behavior while on the AFS-USA program. Excessive alcohol use includes: frequent/regular alcohol consumption; excessive alcohol consumption in one session; and binge drinking. Should participants abuse alcohol or binge drink, they can potentially place themselves or others in danger. This behavior will not be tolerated on the AFS program. Involvement with friends and/or schoolmates who abuse alcohol can also put your AFS program at risk. If participants find themselves in an environment where this is occurring, they should ask their host family or Liaison for assistance.

Call your host parents or another responsible adult (such as your Liaison) if you find yourself at a party or event where there is binge or underage drinking, no matter what time of day or night. Please don't jeopardize your AFS program by ignoring the laws about underage drinking. Everyone at AFS-USA takes these laws seriously.

Smoking

Purchasing or using tobacco products is against the law in the U.S. for anyone under 18 years of age; therefore, all participants under 18 years of age coming to the U.S. are expected to abstain from smoking while on the program.

Attitudes toward smoking in the U.S., especially teenage smoking, have become increasingly disapproving. Many U.S. families do not permit cigarette smoking in their homes. Most businesses, restaurants, and other public places, such as airports and shopping malls, have “no smoking” rules. Most schools also have a “no smoking” policy. Some schools are quite strict with this rule and may suspend students caught smoking.

Since 1997, federal regulations prohibit the sale of tobacco or smokeless tobacco to anyone under the age of 18. U.S. culture emphasizes the rule of law. Thus, when underage participants break a law by smoking, there is a very negative impression associated with that person.

In some states, legislators are considering laws which would impose a fine on parents (including host parents) for allowing minors to be in possession of tobacco products in their homes. While this is not a widespread law, it does indicate the seriousness with which adults in the U.S. are taking the problem of teen smoking.

Remember, when your host family accepted you, they expected a non-smoker or a person who would not smoke while in the U.S.

Body Piercing and Tattoos

Body piercing and tattooing are considered an intentional self-inflicted injury not related to covered mental/nervous condition. Therefore, expenses as a result of or in connection with body piercing and/or tattooing are not covered by AFS Medical Insurance.

The Legal System in the U.S.

In the event that an AFS participant is arrested for any reason, the natural family is responsible for paying all attorney’s fees and fines involved. AFS can help you to find a local attorney, but your natural parents are responsible for paying any fees associated with your arrest, including legal fees.

You should also be aware that there may be differences between your home country’s legal system and that of the U.S. In other words, you should not assume that you will receive the same legal process that exists in your own country while you are in the U.S. **Please keep in mind that an individual whom the police seek to interrogate has the right to have legal counsel present during any interrogation and also has a right to remain silent during such interrogation.** In the event of an arrest, please contact AFS immediately so that we can help ensure that your rights are protected.

Other Risky Behaviors that May be Considered a Reason for Program Termination and Early Return:

In addition to these three non-negotiable rules, there are other reasons that an AFS participant’s program can be terminated. Please be sure to read the Participation Agreement, which you signed as part of your application, as a reminder of the stipulations you agreed to in order to participate in the AFS program.

Your Host Family

Just like your parents, your AFS host family’s first concern is your well-being and safety. Some families are very strict and have specific rules. Other families will tell you what they expect of you and let you make your own decisions. Your family may want you to ask their permission before you make any plans that are different from your daily schedule.

Almost all American families like to know where their children are most of the time, so you should call if you will be late for dinner or are going to visit a friend after school. You should also check with them before you make plans to make sure that it will not conflict with plans they might have made. We ask all our host families to review family rules and expectations when you first arrive. Please ask questions about anything you don't understand or about anything that confuses you.

Safety Inside the Home

It is important to ask your host family the names of people who call your home regularly. There may be times when people call or come to the door who you do not know, such as salesmen, religious groups, or service people. Similarly, salesmen from the newspaper or local services usually like to telephone families during the evening dinner hour. If you are alone when someone calls the home, you should try to keep the conversation brief. Take the basic information, and tell the person that someone from the home will return the call if interested. Often, the caller will be persistent regarding sales or religious sermons. Be firm but polite while keeping the conversation brief. Also, do not commit the host family to any sales over the phone without checking with them first.

Telephone

Answering the Phone

When answering the phone, it is normal practice to say "Hello." Some families answer the phone "Smith residence" or "Hello, this is Jim." It is advisable not to give out any information such as phone numbers, address, or names to strangers on the phone. If the caller asks you what number he or she has dialed, ask the caller what number he or she is trying to reach.

If the number is different from your home phone number, tell the caller that he or she has reached the wrong number and to try again. Never give out a credit card number or any personal information over the phone.

Obscene Phone Calls

If someone calls and tries to use bad, sexual, or obscene language with you on the phone, hang up. Do not give out any information; do not tell the caller where you are, if you are home alone, or what your plans are. If the caller calls back, hang up immediately. Inform your host parents of any such calls.



Answering the Door

Religious groups and sales people sometimes come to the door. Always ask who is at the door or look in the peephole before opening it. Do not invite a stranger into the house. Speak to your host family for instructions on how to answer the door, as it varies from community to community.

Locking Doors and Windows

Ask your family if they lock all doors and windows when leaving the house or while they are still at home. Some communities do not lock doors and windows but others do. If your home has an alarm system, learn how to use it, and memorize the alarm code.

If you find that someone is entering the home illegally, such as a robber or burglar, get out immediately, run to a neighbor's house or any area where there are people around, and call 911.

Internet Usage

Here are some general tips for helping to ensure you and your host family's safety and privacy when using the internet. Please see *Welcome to the USA* for more detailed information on responsible internet use.

- Keep your passwords private, even from your best friend! Your online service will never ask for them, so neither should anyone else.
- Use only your log-in name and/or e-mail address when chatting or sending e-mail.
- Never give out personal information like your name, address, or phone number.
- Do not share photos of yourself, your family, or your home with people you meet online.
- Always delete unknown e-mails without opening them. They can contain destructive viruses. They may contain links to pornographic material and upon accessing them you may encounter serious consequences (see the next section).
- If a person writes something that is mean or makes you feel uncomfortable, don't respond. Just log off and tell your host parents, who can report it to your online service provider.
- Remember that nothing you write on the Web is completely private, including e-mail, so be careful and think about what you type.
- Not everyone is as nice, cute, and funny as it may sound online. Never make plans to meet an online "friend" in person.
- When in doubt, ask your host parents for help and if you're ever unsure, log off! You can always go back online later.

Pornography on the Internet

Sending or receiving pornography, whether by accident or on purpose, is a crime in many parts of the U.S. This includes the transmission of photographs of persons known or unknown to you under the age of eighteen, via cell phone, smart phone or the internet, regardless of whether you have their consent.

As such, AFS-USA strongly discourages participants from accessing any pornographic materials. By doing so, not only do you risk criminal prosecution, but your host family's perception of you could become extremely negative. Involvement with pornography on the internet is grounds for early return home.

In order to avoid accidentally accessing pornographic material, always delete emails from unknown sources and spam without opening them. If you do access a pornographic site, by accident or otherwise, you should immediately notify your host family and local AFS volunteers. For additional information, please see *Welcome to the USA*.

Firearms

People in the U.S. possess firearms or guns for various reasons, from hunting to personal protection. The right to own weapons is granted in the United States Constitution. Currently, gun control is a controversial issue.

A gun or any other weapon is not a toy. Many accidental deaths occur every year when teenagers are looking at or playing with a real gun or other weapon.

If you come across a gun in the home of your host family or in the home of a friend, do not touch it. Participants should only touch or handle guns for the purpose of hunting or sport, and only with the expressed permission of a host parent and under the direct supervision of a host parent or another responsible adult.

Your host parents must ensure that you have an *Activity Waiver* on file as well as extra permission from your natural parents for you to take part in any activity that involves the use of firearms or other weapons. This permission should be obtained by contacting the AFS Support Department at the AFS National Office and informing them of your intention to participate in this activity.

Your host parents must ensure that you have an Activity Waiver on file as well as secure extra permission from your natural parents for you to take part in any activity that involves the use of firearms or other weapons. This permission should be obtained by contacting the AFS Support Department in the AFS National Office and informing them of your intention to participate in this activity.

Safety Outside the Home

Newspapers, radio, and television portray the United States as a violent society. There are a lot of stereotypes about violence on the American streets. Most likely, you will not encounter any violence, as AFS students are not placed in areas that are considered unsafe. However, it is important to remember that the United States is a very diverse country and includes small towns and big cities. Community safety is different in every area. Ask your host family what areas or streets to avoid, and listen to these warnings. Be "street smart."

General Precautions

- Do not act or look like an easy target - look confident!
- Know what and who is around you and where you are going at all times.
- If you see or sense problems on your way, change your route and prepare to run away if necessary.
- If you are unable to run away, give the person anything they ask for and try not to make him or her angry.

Unfortunately, non-violent or petty crimes exist in many parts of the U.S. Beware of pickpocketing, especially in crowds and larger cities. It is advisable not to carry more money with you than you intend to spend that day. Also, be cautious when taking money out of your wallet. Do not show anyone the money you have with you.

Be careful when using telephone cards and bank cash cards (also called ATM cards, for "Automatic Teller Machines") in public places. Stand in front of the machine, and cover the keypad with your hand so that no one can see what you are entering, especially the Personal Identification Number (PIN).

When waiting for public transportation, it is a good idea to wait in a lighted area where people are within shouting distance. Ask your family if your community is safe to walk in at night. In some places, it is advisable to walk with someone else.

Avoid people on the street who look like they may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. These people can be unpredictable and can bring about potentially harmful situations. If they say something to you, it is best to ignore them and walk away.

When approaching your home at night, firmly hold your key for easy access and protection. Ask your family if they leave any lights on when leaving the house and if your community has a "Neighborhood Watch," a community effort to prevent crime and violence.

Although the U.S. is a country of many different ethnic backgrounds, it does not mean that everybody lives together harmoniously. Unfortunately, racism does exist. Furthermore, as a foreigner in the U.S., you may find different treatment will be given to you. Some people may be eager to befriend you. Others may try to take advantage of you in hopes that, as a foreigner, you may not understand the English language or U.S. culture. It is important that you be aware of your surroundings and of the people you are talking to. Do not immediately trust people who are not well known to your host family or the local AFS volunteers.

Threatening Situations

If you are confronted by a person holding a gun, a knife, or any other weapon, give the person whatever he or she wants (for example, your wallet, watch, or jewelry). Remember, your possessions can be replaced, your life cannot. On the other hand, never get into a car even if someone is pointing a knife or a handgun at you from inside the car. If you can, try to run away from the car, screaming at the same time. The person is more likely to abandon the attack than pursue you under these circumstances.

If someone appears angry or gets hostile towards you, do not try to reason with them. If you feel threatened, leave the situation as soon as possible. Try to get to a well-lit area with other people around, and report the situation to your host family and/or the police.

Transportation

Modes of transportation vary widely across the United States. Urban areas often enjoy a much more comprehensive public transportation system than suburban or rural areas, which depend more on car travel. Some public transportation systems are safer than others. It is very important to talk to your host family about how you will get to the places you need to go and how to keep yourself safe in transit.

In a Car

According to the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

- Every hour someone dies in a crash in the U.S. simply from not using their seatbelt
- Seatbelts in vehicles save an estimated 9,500 lives in the U.S. each year
- Seatbelts reduce the risk of fatal injury to front seat passenger car occupants by 45%

You may be thinking, "Why bother to put on a seatbelt for a quick trip to the store or to school?" However, the risk of getting into a serious crash is just as great when you need to take a quick trip as it is on a longer trip. In fact, we know that 75 percent of all serious motor vehicle crashes occur within 25 miles of a person's home.

In addition, all states have laws requiring children to wear seatbelts or be restrained in an age/weight appropriate seat. (Most states consider a child to be 16-18 or younger.) In addition, 19 states require all adult passengers in a vehicle to be restrained and the rest (except New Hampshire) require those in the front seat to use seatbelts. A driver may be ticketed and fined for not adhering to their state's rules; however, more importantly you as a passenger put yourself at risk by not "buckling up."

How Seatbelts Work

In a crash, seatbelts...

- Hold you in place
- Distribute the impact of the stronger parts of your body, such as your chest, hips, and shoulders
- Allow the body to slow down gradually
- Protect the head and spinal cord

Whether you are in the car of a friend or host family member, always remember to buckle up! To find out more about seat belt use and transportation safety issues in your state, log on to <http://nhtsa.gov>.

On a School Bus

School bus transportation is safe. In fact, buses are safer than cars! Even so, every year, hundreds of students are injured, and some are even killed in incidents involving school buses in the U.S. More often than not, these injuries and deaths did not occur in a crash, but as the pupils were entering and exiting the bus. Remember these safety tips:

- Wait for your bus in a safe place, away from traffic and the street.
- Stay away from the bus until it comes to a complete stop and the driver signals you to enter.
- When being dropped off, exit the bus and walk ten giant steps away from the bus. Keep a safe distance between you and the bus. Also, remember that the bus driver can see you best when you are back away from the bus.
- Use the handrail to enter and exit the bus.
- Be aware of the street traffic around you. Drivers are required to follow certain rules of the road concerning school buses, however, not all do. Protect yourself and watch out!

While Walking/Jogging

- Cars in the U.S. drive on the right side of the road.
- Always walk in the opposite direction of the traffic so that you can see what is coming.
- When possible, avoid walking alone. Walk with someone, or walk in areas where other people are near.
- Stay in well-lighted areas, away from alleys, bushes, and entryways.
- Avoid shortcuts through parks, vacant lots, and other deserted places.
- Don't accept rides from strangers.
- If a driver stops to ask you directions, avoid getting near the car.

- If you suspect you are being followed, go to the nearest business or residence for help.
- If you are harassed by the occupants of a car, turn and walk the other direction. The driver will have to turn around to follow you.
- When you return home, have your door key ready so that you can enter without delay.
- Don't use headphones with music when walking in isolated areas at any time of day.
- Regularly change your routines.
- Always be alert in parking lots, especially when it's dark. If you are afraid, ask someone to escort you to the car or public transportation stop.
- Be alert at all times.

Public Transportation

- Remember, there is usually safety in numbers. Wait in a coffee shop or in a well-lit area for the public transport to arrive.
- If the bus or train is empty, don't choose the window seat as you may be "blocked in" by a potential assailant; always choose an aisle seat for quick exit.
- After peak hours, always choose the train compartment carrying the most passengers or the compartment directly behind the train driver.
- On buses, sit behind the driver or next to the door for quick exit.



Safety in School

Be aware of students in school who are involved in illegal activities such as drugs. Avoid students who are violent. If you hear students planning or threatening to perform a violent act, hear a rumor about such plans, or if you feel threatened in any way, go to your guidance counselor, teacher, or AFS school contact. You can also talk to your Liaison or another AFS volunteer.

It is advisable not to keep valuable items in your school locker or to bring expensive items to school (jewelry, electronics, credit cards, excess cash, etc.)

Potentially dangerous situations are excellent subjects to discuss with your host family. By talking about safety and what you can do to prevent potentially harmful situations, you can learn a lot about U.S. Americans' attitudes towards crime.

Seasonal Flu Advisory

What is the flu?

Influenza or "the flu" is a contagious respiratory disease caused by varieties of the influenza virus that, in the U.S., is most commonly contracted during the fall and winter seasons.

How does the flu spread?

Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people may get the flu by touching something with germs on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Infected people may be able to spread the flu to others beginning one (1) day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

What can I do to protect myself from catching the flu?

You can prevent getting infected by avoiding close contact with people who show flu-like symptoms (try to maintain a distance of about 1 meter if possible) and taking the following measures:

- Avoid touching your mouth and nose
- Clean hands thoroughly with soap and water, or cleanse them with an alcohol-based hand rub on a regular basis
- Avoid close contact with people who might be ill
- Reduce the time spent in crowded settings, if possible
- Improve airflow in your living space by opening windows
- Practice good health habits including getting adequate sleep, eating nutritious food, and keeping physically active

How do I know if I have the flu?

Typical symptoms to watch for include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Headache
- Body Aches
- Sore Throat
- Runny Nose
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

What should I do if I get sick?

If you become ill with flu-like symptoms there are several steps you should take:

1. Contact your doctor, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your doctor will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.
2. Stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.
3. If you experience any of the following symptoms, seek emergency medical care:
 - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
 - Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
 - Sudden dizziness
 - Confusion
 - Severe or persistent vomiting

Does the AFS participant medical plan cover the cost of flu vaccinations?

Vaccinations are not covered by the AFS Participant Medical Plan. Natural parents must give permission for vaccinations while a participant is abroad and are responsible for the cost of vaccinations. The plan does cover expenses if a participant gets sick.

If a host school or community decides to require the flu vaccination and the participant has not already been vaccinated in the home country, AFS-USA staff will inform AFS staff in the home country so that they may obtain the parents' permission for the shot. In this case, natural parents should ensure that the participant will be able to pay for the shot.

Any claims sent to GMMI for vaccinations will be denied (GMMI is the AFS Participant Medical Plan administrator). Related information is also included in the *AFS Participant Medical Plan*.

Expenses for Routine Physical Exams or Preventative Care

The *Participant Medical Plan* does not pay for routine physicals, inoculations, vaccinations, or examinations, even if required by schools. For example, schools often require a sports physical examination prior to allowing participants to participate in school sports. Participants and/or natural parents are expected to pay for these expenses directly.

Endemic Illness Advisory

Certain diseases are endemic to areas of the United States, such as Lyme disease in the Northeast and Valley Fever in the Southwest. Please ask your host parents and/or local volunteers for advice regarding any precautionary measures that can be taken to avoid contracting such diseases. As always, if you begin to feel unwell, be sure to let your host parents know so that they can assist you in getting treatment.

Weather

Wherever you live in the U.S., at some point you are likely to experience severe weather, be it very hot and dry temperatures or excessive rain and flooding. In all cases, the best way to protect yourself is to follow the advice given to you by your host parents, teachers, or other responsible adults.

Most participants are likely to experience a thunderstorm during their stay and some may experience a tornado warning or an actual tornado. Since there will be times when you find yourself outside of the company of a responsible adult, below are steps which you should take to protect yourself in the event of a thunderstorm or a tornado.

Thunderstorms

Thunderstorms can occur at any time of the year and just about anywhere in the world. Lightning is perhaps the most common and deadly threat of a thunderstorm. Lightning always accompanies a thunderstorm. It is estimated that lightning hits the earth 100 times each second. That's 8.6 million strikes per day and over three billion each year. Lightning is five times hotter than the sun. A single bolt can reach 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

The 30/30 rule is good way of knowing when you're in danger. Count the seconds between seeing lightning and hearing thunder. If this time is 30 seconds or less, the lightning is close enough to be a threat. Seek shelter immediately. After seeing the last lightning flash, wait 30 minutes before leaving shelter. More than half of lightning deaths occur after the storm has passed. Stay in safe shelter until the threat has passed.

Indoors:

- Stay off land line phones.
- Stay away from windows.
- Use flashlights if the power goes out.
- Discontinue use of phones and electrical equipment. You may also want to unplug appliances and computers.
- Avoid taking a shower or bath. If lightning strikes your house it may send a current of electricity across metal plumbing throughout the house.

Outdoors:

- Stay low.
- If possible, find shelter in a building.
- Keep away from trees, tall objects, metal objects, and water.
- Boaters and swimmers should get to land as soon as possible.
- If you're in a group caught outside, spread out. If you begin to feel your hair stand on end, this indicates lightning is about to strike. You should drop to your knees and bend forward placing your hands on your knees and crouch down. Do not lie flat on the ground; this will only make you a larger target.

Tornadoes

The unique geography of the United States helps to produce some of the most favorable conditions for tornadoes to occur. The months with the greatest number of tornadoes overall are April, May, and June, but tornadoes can occur during any month of the year. Tornado seasons vary in different parts of the United States. In the Southeast, the peak season for tornadoes is February through April. In the Northern Plains, tornadoes are most likely to develop from June through August. Generally, tornado frequency is high in the South in late winter and early spring; and in the Plains, Midwest, and Ohio Valley from early spring through summer.

If a tornado warning is issued for your location, take the following steps immediately if you are:

At Home:

- Go at once to the basement, storm cellar, or the lowest level of the building.
- If there is no basement, go to an inner hallway or a smaller inner room without windows, such as a bathroom or closet.
- Get away from the windows.
- Go to the center of the room. Debris can sometimes come through walls.
- Get under a piece of sturdy furniture such as a workbench or heavy table or desk and hold on to it.
- If you have time, get a mattress or blankets to protect your head and the heads of any children with you. If you don't have time, use your arms to protect your head and neck.
- If at school, follow the instructions given by your teacher or other responsible adult. If there is no teacher around to give instructions, do the following:
 - Go to the basement or to an inside hallway at the lowest level.
 - Avoid places with wide-span roofs such as auditoriums, cafeterias, or hallways.
 - Get under a piece of sturdy furniture such as a workbench or heavy table or desk and hold on to it.
 - Use your arms to protect your head and neck.

Outdoors:

- If possible, get inside a building.
- If shelter is not available or there is no time to get indoors, lie in a ditch or low-lying area or crouch near a strong building. Be aware of the potential for flooding.
- Use your arms to protect your head and neck.

In a car:

- A driver should never try to out-drive a tornado in a car or truck. Tornadoes can change direction quickly and can lift up a car or truck and toss it through the air.
- Get out of the car immediately and take shelter in a nearby building.
- If there is no time to get indoors, get out of the car and lie in a ditch or low-lying area away from the vehicle. Be aware of the potential for flooding.

Hurricanes

In the U.S., hurricanes may bring very strong winds, rain, and flooding to areas on the Atlantic and Gulf coastlines. The Atlantic hurricane season starts on June 1st. In the U.S., the peak hurricane threat exists from mid-August to late October, although the official hurricane season extends through November.

If you live in an area that may be susceptible to hurricanes, your host family likely has a plan for what they will do in case of a storm. Following their plan and staying with your host family is the key to your safety during a hurricane. The information below is from the National Weather Service's guide on Hurricane Preparedness. It may be helpful to share this information with your host family.

Before the Storm...

When in a Watch Area:

- Frequently listen to radio, TV, or NOAA Weather Radio for official bulletins of the storm's progress.
- Fuel and service family vehicles.
- Inspect and secure mobile home tie downs.
- Have extra cash on hand.
- Prepare to cover all windows and doors with shutters or other shielding materials.
- Check batteries and stock up on canned food, first-aid supplies, drinking water, and medications.
- Bring in light-weight objects such as garbage cans, garden tools, toys, and lawn furniture.

Plan to leave if you:

- Live in a mobile home. They are unsafe in high winds no matter how well fastened to the ground
- Live on the coastline, an offshore island, or near a river or a flood plain
- Live in a high-rise building

During the Storm...

When in a Warning Area:

- Stay away from moving water. Moving water even 6 feet deep can sweep you away.
- Do not allow children, especially under age 13, to play in flooded areas. They can drown or be injured in areas that appear to be safe.
- If someone needs to be rescued, call professionals with the right equipment to help. Many people have been killed or injured trying to rescue others in flooded areas.
- Stay away from standing water. It may be electrically charged from underground or downed power lines.
- Have professionals check gas, water, and electrical lines and appliances for damage.
- Use a flashlight for emergency lighting. Never use candles or other open flames indoors.
- Use tap water for drinking and cooking only when local officials say it is safe to do so.
- Use the telephone only for emergency calls.
- Notify neighbors and a family member outside of the warned area of your evacuation plans.
- Take pets with you. Leaving pets behind is likely to result in their being injured, lost, or killed.
- Move to a safe area before you are cut off by flood water.

If staying in a home:

- Only stay in a home if you have not been ordered to leave. Stay inside a well-constructed building. Examine the building and decide what you will do if winds become strong enough to produce deadly missiles and structural failure.
- Turn your refrigerator to its coldest setting and keep it closed.
- Turn off utilities if told to do so by authorities.
- Turn off propane tanks.
- Unplug small appliances.
- Fill your bathtub and large containers with water for sanitary purposes.

In strong winds:

- Stay away from windows and doors even if they are covered. Take refuge in a small interior room, closet, or hallway
- Close all interior doors. Secure and brace external doors.
- In a two-story house, go to an interior first-floor room, such as a bathroom or closet.
- In a multiple-story building, go to the first or second floors and stay in interior rooms away from windows.

- Lie on the floor under a table or another sturdy object.
- Listen closely to the radio, TV, or NOAA Weather Radio for official bulletins.
- Complete preparation activities, such as putting up storm shutters, storing loose objects, etc.
- Follow instructions issued by local officials. Leave immediately if told to do so!
- If evacuating, leave early (if possible, in daylight). Stay with friends or relatives, stay at a low-rise, inland hotel/motel, or go to a public shelter outside a flood zone.

Earthquakes

Earthquakes are fairly common in some parts of the U.S. While most are too small to feel, you may experience the earth shaking at some point during your program. The most important thing to remember during an earthquake is to remain calm. The following tips will be helpful, in case your area experiences an earthquake.

What to Do When the Shaking Begins:

- DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON! Move only a few steps to a nearby safe place. Stay indoors until the shaking stops and you're sure it's safe to exit. Stay away from windows. In a high-rise building, expect the fire alarms and sprinklers to go off during a quake.
- If you are in bed, hold on and stay there, protecting your head with a pillow.
- If you are outdoors, find a clear spot away from buildings, trees, and power lines. Drop to the ground.
- If you are in a car, ask the driver to slow down and drive to a clear place (as described above). Stay in the car until the shaking stops.

What to Do After the Shaking Stops:

- Check yourself for injuries. Protect yourself from further danger by putting on long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, sturdy shoes, and work gloves.
- Check others for injuries. Give first aid for serious injuries.
- Look for and extinguish small fires. Eliminate fire hazards. Turn off the gas if you smell gas or think it's leaking. (Remember, only a professional should turn it back on.)
- Listen to the radio for instructions.
- Expect smaller earthquakes, called aftershocks, to follow. Each time you feel one, DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON!
- Inspect your home for damage. Get everyone out if your home is unsafe.
- Use the telephone only to report life-threatening emergencies.

Source: Red Cross - http://www.redcross.org/services/prepare/0,1082,0_241_00.html

Emergencies

Since you can't always predict an emergency, the best protection is to be prepared. You should always carry your identification card. That way, if there is an emergency, you can get help.

911 - In the United States and Canada, the telephone number for police, fire, or ambulance emergency services is 9-1-1. This line is available 24 hours a day. There may be a more specific number to use for particular emergencies, like Poison Control. Ask your host family to provide you with the important emergency contact numbers.

In the event of an emergency, accident, or serious illness:

- Call your host family first. Let them know what happened and where you are.
- If you are unable to reach your family and you have an emergency during the week, call your AFS National Office at 1-800-AFS-INFO (800-237-4636).
- If you are unable to reach that office, or if it is an evening or weekend, you should call the AFS National Office at 1-800-AFS-INFO (800-237-4636) and dial 9 for the emergency Duty Officer. AFS Staff are available 24 hours a day for emergencies only.

Personal Safety

It can be difficult to handle a new situation within your home society but, in a culture that is new to you, such a situation can seem even more confusing. By presenting you with some legal and cultural rules of the US, we hope to help you make informed decisions when confronted with sexual harassment, alcohol, and other drugs.

In any situation you may encounter during your stay in the U.S., it is important to keep in mind that you should not compromise your personal moral values while you are here on the AFS program. While it is important for an exchange student to be open-minded, adventuresome, and accepting of the host culture, this does not mean you should ignore everything you have learned in your home culture. It is always a good idea to observe the behavior of those around you, then follow what you have learned concerning what is right and what is wrong.

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

- Get to know the host culture through questions, dialogue, and discussion with your host family, peers, and the AFS local contacts.
- Take seriously any concerns expressed by your host family, school, and AFS volunteers, and follow their advice.
- As stated in the *Participation Agreement* that you signed prior to leaving home, the AFS National Office will make recommendations and give you guidelines for physical welfare and security. Take this advice seriously and follow these guidelines.
- Do not ignore your instincts or feel you have to compromise your own personal values and beliefs. These are valuable resources in making decisions about what to do.
- Read *Welcome to the USA* and take personal responsibility for making smart choices that will keep you safe and healthy.

Know the Rules to Keep Yourself Safe

Rule 1: Don't Go Out Alone

Remember that if you can avoid situations that put you at risk in the first place, you're already one step ahead. There is safety in numbers and this rule is not just for little kids; it applies to everyone. We are always safer if we take a friend, host sister, or host brother.

Rule 2: Always Tell an Adult Where You're Going

Never ever go anywhere with someone you don't know. This includes hitching rides and babysitting for anyone without getting information about the family first. Leave a telephone number and an address with your family before you go. Letting someone know where you'll be at all times is smart. If you're ever faced with a risky situation or get into trouble, your host family and friends will know where to begin looking for you.

Rule 3: It's Your Body

During your exchange year, you will face a lot of situations that put you in uncomfortable spots. You will constantly have to make decisions for yourself and you will be faced with peer pressure about everything from who your friends are – male or female – to drugs and sex. You have the right to reject unwanted and inappropriate attention such as teasing, touching, and bullying.

Rule 4: Say NO if You Feel Threatened and Tell a Trusted Adult

Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself. Listen to your intuition and follow your best judgement. Just because your friends are making bad decisions doesn't mean you have to too. Have the confidence to say NO if anyone makes you feel uncomfortable about anything. And remember, it is never too late for you to tell an adult if anything is bothering you. If someone -anyone- touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to say no. Even if it is a member of your own host family who touches you in a manner that makes you feel uneasy, you should express your discomfort to him/ her, or tell your Liaison immediately.

Certain signs of affection or physical contact that may be typical for your host family may make you feel uncomfortable, as physical boundaries and "normal" signs of affection differ from culture to culture. For example, it is common for a participant from France to greet someone with a kiss on each cheek. In contrast, a participant from Japan, who may typically greet someone with a slight bow may be uncomfortable with or misinterpret such physical contact. Furthermore, while your host family members may feel comfortable giving each other a foot, back or shoulder massage after a long day at work, tough sports or dance practice, etc., you should not request from, nor should your host parents or siblings request from or give to you, any type of massage, in order to avoid any possible misunderstandings and/or discomfort.

Whether it is peer pressure about sex, drugs, or doing something that you know is wrong, be strong and stand your ground. Don't be afraid to make your feelings known.

Sensitive Situations

If you find yourself dealing with a sensitive situation, including, but not limited to, any of the issues addressed in this handbook, it is important that you share this information with your Liaison, even if you are apprehensive about others' reactions and would prefer to keep the situation to yourself. You might be unaware of the resources and support that AFS can provide in these types of circumstances. It is important to know that AFS Liaisons undergo in-depth training so that they are well-equipped to support our participants under such circumstances.

Please contact your Liaison immediately to share any sensitive information that may affect your personal safety or well-being. He/She will have the resources and discretion to provide or obtain the appropriate support to assist you.

Teen Pregnancy

Thinking About the Right-Now: What Teens Want Other Teens to Know About Preventing Teen Pregnancy

A Message from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

When it comes to teen pregnancy — why it happens and how to prevent it — teens get loads of advice from adults, but they aren't often asked to offer their own. Along with Teen People magazine, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy set out to change this by asking teens directly what they would say to other teens about preventing pregnancy.

This advice is based on suggestions offered by readers of Teen People. The Campaign's own Youth Leadership team and teen visitors to the Campaign's website also played a key role in developing these tips.

As so many of you have made clear, the teen years shouldn't be about pregnancy, parenting, midnight feedings, and diapers. We hope that you find these ideas useful and perhaps see your own views and opinions reflected in them.

- Thinking "it won't happen to me" is stupid; if you don't protect yourself, it probably will. Sex is serious. Make a plan.
- Just because you think "everyone is doing it," doesn't mean they are. Some are, some aren't — and some are lying.
- There are a lot of good reasons to say "no, not yet." Protecting your feelings is one of them.
- You're in charge of your own life. Don't let anyone pressure you into having sex.
- You can always say "no" — even if you've said, "yes" before.
- Carrying a condom is just being smart — it doesn't mean you're pushy or easy.
- If you think birth control "ruins the mood," consider what a pregnancy test will do to it.
- If you're drunk or high, you can't make good decisions about sex. Don't do something you might not remember or might really regret.
- Sex won't make someone "yours", and a baby won't make them stay.
- Not ready to be someone's parent? It's simple: Use protection every time or don't have sex.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Life Planning Education, Advocates for Youth, Washington DC

Signs and Symptoms of STIs

Any of the following symptoms can be an indicator of an STI. If you have any of the following symptoms, you should see a doctor.

- Redness or soreness of the genitals
- Pain at urination; cloudy or strong-smelling urine
- Unusual discharge from the penis or vagina
- A sore or blisters on or around the genitals, near the anus or inside the mouth
- Excessive itching or a rash
- Abdominal cramping
- A slight fever and an overall sick feeling
- A sexual partner with symptoms
- Weight loss, fatigue, night sweats, purple lesions on the skin, rare pneumonia and other diseases (AIDS symptoms)

STI Prevention

The only completely effective preventive measure is to abstain from oral, anal, and vaginal sexual intercourse. Contact with another person's body fluids can result in an STI. There are several ways to reduce the risk of contracting an STI when having sex:

For the greatest protection: Use condoms and a spermicide, such as nonoxynol-9, every time you have sex. Use a moisture barrier, such as a dental dam, cut-open latex condom, or plastic wrap, when having oral intercourse with a female partner.

For minimal protection: Inspect your partner's private parts; wash your private parts after sexual intercourse; urinate after sexual intercourse; use contraceptive foams, jellies, and creams that contain nonoxyno-9; limit your sexual partners to one person; avoid partners who have sex with other partners; talk to your partner about her/his sexual habits, drug use, and health; get tested for STIs with your partner.

Appropriate Response to an STI

- Seek medical treatment immediately
- Inform your sexual partner(s)
- Encourage partner(s) to get treatment
- Abstain from sexual contact while contagious

HIV and AIDS Information

Introduction

The topic of HIV and AIDS can seem overwhelming: it seems like every day the newspaper reports a new fact about the disease. Fortunately, although scientists and epidemiologists keep generating information that refines our understanding of the disease, the basic information about how the virus works and how contracting HIV and AIDS can be prevented has remained the same for quite some time.

What is the Difference between HIV and AIDS?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. It is the virus that causes AIDS. The name indicates that it is found in humans, that it attacks the immune system, and that it is a virus.

AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. "Acquired" refers to the fact that you get the disease from something else. "Immune" refers to the body's system for fighting off disease, and "deficiency" indicates a weakness in that system. "Syndrome" means a collection of symptoms and diseases.

"AIDS" is a term used by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to refer to the most serious stage of a person's infection with HIV. The CDC has a list of symptoms and diseases that indicate a person has AIDS. Once a person has an indicator of disease, she or he is counted as a reported case of AIDS.

How Does HIV Make Someone Sick?

HIV slowly weakens the immune system, which is the body's defense against infection and illness. A strong immune system protects us against illness and helps us recover once we get sick. The immune system attacks and destroys germs that enter the body.

Each of the many different kinds of cells that make up the immune system performs a different job, although they all work together to protect the cells in the immune system that help keep a person healthy. These helper cells, called "T-cells," are responsible for your body's response to infection. The HIV virus enters T-cells and begins to multiply. The T-cells become miniature factories that reproduce HIV. Eventually, the virus kills the T-cell.

As more and more T-cells die, the immune system is less able to do its job of protecting the body from opportunistic infections. The word "opportunistic" means that these infections take advantage of a weak immune system and the opportunity to invade the body. Many of these opportunistic infections are very rare, and some had never been seen in humans before AIDS. Eventually, one or more of these opportunistic infections eventually kills a person with AIDS.

Is There a Cure for AIDS?

There is no cure for AIDS. No vaccine has been developed to inoculate people against the virus and no medicine has yet been formulated to kill the virus in people who are already infected.

Will Everyone Who is Infected with HIV Develop AIDS and Die?

It is unclear whether everyone who is infected with HIV will develop AIDS, but researchers estimate that a very high percentage of people with HIV will develop AIDS. Eventually, most people with AIDS die of one or more of the opportunistic infections that invade their bodies.

When Are People with the Virus Infectious to Others?

People with HIV are infectious to others as soon as they are carrying the virus, even before antibodies are produced. People with HIV may not know they are infected and may look, act, and feel healthy for a long time, possibly longer than 15 years. It is impossible to tell from looking whether or not a person has HIV.

How is HIV Transmitted?

HIV is transmitted from person to person through blood or membrane contact with blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk. Ways to get the virus include:

- Exchanging blood, semen, or vaginal secretions during sex (vaginal, oral, and anal) with someone who has HIV
- Sharing needles – which are used for injecting drugs (including steroids), tattooing, or ear piercing – with someone who has HIV
- Being born to a mother who has the virus (HIV can be passed to a fetus through the umbilical cord while it is still inside the mother, through contact with vaginal fluids and blood during birth, or through breast milk)

HIV cannot survive in air, water, or on things people touch.

You cannot get it from:

- Touching, talking to, or sharing a home with a person who has HIV or AIDS
- Sharing plates, glasses, or towels used by someone with HIV or AIDS
- Using swimming pools, hot tubs, drinking fountains, toilet seats, doorknobs, gym equipment, or telephones used by people with HIV or AIDS
- Someone with HIV or AIDS spitting, sweating, or crying on you
- Being bitten by mosquitoes
- Donating blood
- Being sneezed or coughed on by a person with HIV or AIDS

What is “Safer Sex?”

“Safer sex” describes a range of ways that sexually active people can help protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Practicing safer sex can also help prevent unplanned pregnancy.

How do I deal with peer pressure to become sexually active?

First, remember that almost everyone has to figure out how to deal with peer pressure. It doesn't happen by magic, but here are some tips for keeping the pressure off:

- Casually date several people and hang out with different groups of people.
- Go out with a group of friends rather than only your date.
- Think of what you would say in advance in case someone tries to pressure you.
- Be ready to call your host parents or a friend to pick you up if you need to leave a date.
- You never need to "pay someone back" with sex in return for an expensive date or gift.
- Say "no" and mean "no" if that's how you feel.

For more information about HIV, STIs, and other issues, go to <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/> or <http://www.iwannaknow.org> for answers to your questions about teen sexual health and sexually transmitted infections.

Preventing & Identifying Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment has become a major issue in the United States. It is now accepted that certain types of sexual advances, either verbal or physical, are seen as inappropriate and, if you initiate these advances, you could be breaking the law.

For an exchange student, this can mean being expelled from school, speaking to the police, and even being sent back to your home country.

Because of differing cultural perspectives on sexual harassment, it is important for participants to be aware of what is considered to be proper behavior. Below are a few tips:

- Treat everyone you meet with respect.
- Listen to what people are saying to you, and act accordingly. In other words, if someone says no, you should assume he or she means it!
- Get to know your AFS Liaison and other respected people in your host community. They will be able to provide you with valuable information about what is and what is not acceptable.

When a person asks you to stop making sexual advances towards him or her, it is your responsibility to stop. Likewise, if you ask someone to stop, he or she should listen. "No means no" is a phrase being used a lot in the U.S. to encourage women and men to speak up if they want to stop unwanted advances. It is also being used to educate people to stop advances they are making when someone says "no."

Protecting Yourself from Sexual Abuse

During your AFS experience, you'll have many new and different experiences. Yet some things remain the same:

- Your body is always yours.
- You always have the right to say no.
- If something doesn't feel right to you, it probably isn't.
- If a friend gives you cause for concern, get involved.

This information is designed to help you learn more about sexual abuse, how to prevent it, and where to go for help. Be sure to speak with your host family, your Liaison, or another adult you trust about keeping yourself safe in your community.

What Constitutes Sexual Abuse?

As defined by the U.S. Army Sexual Assault Prevention & Response Program, sexual abuse is:

“A form of gender discrimination that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual abuse occurs when a person is subjected to offensive, unwanted, or unsolicited comments and behavior of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.”

Regardless of where you travel on your exchange program or the customs of the country in which you're living, you can be sure of one thing: your body belongs to you. While it's rare that someone will attempt to abuse you, it's important for you to be alert, aware, and informed about sexual abuse prevention. Do not allow anyone to do anything to you that does not feel right to you, regardless of who they are - male or female, young or old, what they do for a living, or your connection to him or her.

True or False Quiz

Help protect yourself from potential sexual abuse. Circle True or False to each of these questions. Correct answers are on the next page.

1. True or False: When abuse happens, it is never your fault.
2. True or False: An abuser may discourage you from communicating with your friends, family, and AFS volunteers or ask that you not tell others about your relationship with him or her.
3. True or False: If someone, especially an adult, buys you an expensive gift and expects you to kiss him or her in return, you are obligated to do so.
4. True or False: Activities like being forced to look at pornographic books or film, or being photographed in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, are not sexual abuse. For sexual abuse to occur, you must be physically touched.
5. True or False: If you are feeling uncomfortable because of physical attention you receive from someone, you should confront that person and tell him or her to stop.

Tips for Preventing & Dealing with Sexual Abuse

Remember that it's always ok to say no.

If you feel threatened, tell an adult that you trust. This can be your natural parents, your host parents, an AFS volunteer or staff, or anyone else that you feel you can trust and rely upon.

Never go anywhere with a person you don't know.

When you go out, always let an adult know where you are, and when your schedule or destination changes.

Be a Friend to a Friend

If your friend tells you that he or she is being sexually abused, the first thing to do is listen. Be patient and respectful. Try not to judge or question your friend's behavior. Believe what your friend is telling you.

Go to an adult you trust for advice and help. Involve a parent, teacher, or another adult that you trust. You will not be 'snitching.' You'll be helping to stop or prevent your friend from being abused.

Talk to your friend and try to get him or her to talk to an adult. Offer to go with him or her. Report the abuser to an adult whom you trust.

Answers to the True and False Quiz

1. **True** - If you are sexually abused, it is never your fault. Always expect others to treat you with respect and dignity. You deserve an environment that is free of sexual abuse or the threat of sexual abuse.
2. **True** - One strategy of sexual abusers is to isolate you from your friends, family, and others. Without the support of others, people feel lonely and often vulnerable. This allows abusers to get closer to their victims. Expect to have access to your friends and family.
3. **False** - Some sexual abusers try to make people feel uncomfortable by getting them to do things, such as kissing, as a way to show appreciation. If you feel pressure to do something you are not comfortable with, don't do it. By the way, if you don't feel comfortable accepting a gift, you can say no to that too!
4. **False** - You don't have to be touched to be sexually abused. Being exposed to pornographic books or films is another way that an abuser will try to exploit you. Do not tolerate this. Report this to an adult that you trust.
5. **True** - Confront any person who is sexually abusing you and tell him or her to stop immediately. Always tell a trusted adult or AFS volunteer or staff about it as soon as possible.

How To Get Help

Local AFS volunteers and AFS Staff are available to help you in the event of sexual abuse that you or another has experienced. Contact your Liaison immediately if you feel scared or concerned. You can find their contact information on your AFS ID card. You can also reach AFS-USA Support Staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-AFS-INFO (800-237-4636).



AFS-USA Mission

AFS-USA works toward a more just and peaceful world by providing international and intercultural learning experiences to individuals, families, schools and communities through a global volunteer partnership.

AFS-USA, Inc.

120 Wall Street, 4th Floor

New York, NY 10005

Fax (212) 299-9090

1-800-AFS-INFO (800-237-4636)

<http://www.afsusa.org>